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"THIS IS DAISY. DAISY DEAR, THIS LADY IS YOUR AUNT, MRS. DENISON!" SAID MRS. DARE.

THE FAMILY DISGRACE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

THE last rays of the setting sun shone into a neat but poorly furnished apartment in a small house on the outskirts of Bristol, which was occupied by two women.

The one was richly clad, haughty in bearing, and evidently beyond the prime of life. Her handsome, high-bred face was repellent in its coldness and contempt, her light grey eyes looked as though no tender feeling had ever darkened their depths, no tear ever dimmed their steely brightness.

She stood by a little table, one delicately gloved hand resting upon it, and her gaze fixed upon the other occupant of the room—a slender, pretty woman, who had certainly not seen more than twenty-five summers; but, alas! the widow's cap already concealed the luxuriant

yellow-brown hair, the sweet face was sorrowful beyond its years, and the soft eyes had known many a weary vigil, many a bitter tear.

She trembled under the other's fixed regard, and the white, thin fingers were interlaced as though she struggled desperately to maintain her composure.

"At last," said the woman by the table, "at last you have been compelled to apply to me for assistance. Long ago you reaped the reward of your folly, as I told you you inevitably would. It has taken years to humble your pride, and I know that you come to me as a last resource. Why should I help you?"

The sad eyes were dewy as she lifted them to the handsome face.

"Because, Marcia, the same blood is in our veins. Your father was mine also, although you called another woman mother. And," here the sweet voice faltered, "I am all alone in the world."

"Where are your husband's relatives?"

"He had none, or, for love of him, they would have helped me. It is not for my own sake I implore your assistance, but for my little child. Oh! by your womanhood Marcia, give me the

help I am sure my father would not have refused me in my distress."

"He was as incensed as I at your mad conduct. By his will he proved that."

"It was made in a fit of passion. You reaped the benefit of my folly as you are pleased to call it. Surely you should not complain."

"Do you think," cried the other, passion breaking through her coldness, "that I forget you are the family disgrace! That you cast scorn upon our name when you elected to marry Walter Dare, the struggling teacher of music, who had nothing but his handsome face to recommend him; who was without influence, without birth?"

The brown eyes lost something of their softness as the widow answered, quietly,—

"You are speaking of one whom you could never understand, whose life was a record of nobility and kindness. We were poor, but we were very happy. Oh, Marcia! I am sorry for you often, because you have missed the best gifts of earth."

Marcia laughed scornfully.

"Well, you do not seem to have reaped much benefit from the 'best gifts of earth' Lena. You

have dragged out an existence such as few art sams wives know, for seven years; you have lost much of your beauty, and are now a pauper. What do you propose doing? Tell me your plans quickly; I must be going."

"I have been offered a situation as under-teacher in a large school; the salary is twenty pounds a year. I can live on that easily; but what is to become of my child? Marcia, Marcia, I entreat you to help me; she can be boarded out easily and cheaply. It is so little I ask of your plenty."

"Let me see the child."

Mrs. Dare rose, and opening the door called softly,—

"Daisy darling, mamma wants you."

She waited for the sound of little steps upon the stairs, and the shadows lifted from her eyes when a beautiful little face, surrounded by a tangle of bright brown hair, appeared. Drawing the child into the room, she said,—

"This is Daisy—Daisy dear, this lady is your aunt, Mrs. Denison."

From under the tangle of hair peeped out a pair of brown eyes so like her mother's that Mrs. Denison was startled, but she said, imperiously,—

"Come here, Daisy, I want to look at you," and, with the fearfulness of one accustomed only to kindness, the child obeyed.

She had an exquisite face, and, young as it was, it was not devoid of character. She bore her aunt's scrutiny unflinchingly, with a little air of dignity vastly quaint and pretty, and when the lady condescended to tender her hand, slipped her small fingers into it, saying, "How do you do, ma'am?" and evidently expected a kiss; but as none was forthcoming she went back to her mother's side, standing there in silence.

"You say, Lena, that your future is provided for; very well, there is only the child to consider. I suppose you would do anything for her sake?"

"Anything, so long as I secured her happiness; she is not used to harshness, and although we have always been poor, Daisy has not felt the sting of poverty. I would keep her youth glad—and, Marcia, you will help me to do this!" In her earnestness she went so far as to take her sister's unresponsive hand in hers, looking at her so entreatingly that she seemed irresistible.

"Send the child away," commanded Mrs. Denison, and at a gesture from her mother, Daisy went out; then the visitor broke silence.

"When you took your life into your own hands to wreck it, when you defied my father and scorned my advice, disgracing yourself and me by your marriage, I resolved never to see or speak with you again. For seven years I have kept my word. I am not one to make a vow and lightly break it; but when you presumed so far as to address me, I determined to grant you the generosity you do not deserve. Whilst refusing to acknowledge or receive you, I am willing to do my best for the child."

The widow, who had been drooping before her, now looked up eagerly, gratefully.

"Oh, Heaven bless you, Marcia," she cried, "and forgive me that I wronged you in my thoughts."

Mrs. Denison looked distinctly uncomfortable for a moment, then she said in her usual manner,—

"Do not be so profuse with your gratitude until you have heard my conditions. They are as follows. Daisy will at once leave your care, returning with me to-night to town."

"Marcia, I cannot part with her yet—not quite so soon. It was but yesterday I buried her father, and she is all I have."

"Hear me out, if you please, and if you refuse to accept my terms, remember I shall do nothing, and any further appeal from you will be useless. My niece is henceforth to be my ward, I to have supreme control over her. So far as is possible she will be taught to forget the past, and the history of her parents must be a sealed book to her. She shall be reared as my own child would have been, but only on condition that you never reveal your identity to her, never attempt to see her."

"What!" cried the young mother, "sell my child! Part with her when she is dearer to me

than life itself. You are jesting and the jest is cruel."

"Was I ever given to jesting?" demanded Mrs. Denison, coldly. "Do I ever speak without due consideration?"

"You were always hard, and rather than my child should grow like you, should learn to forget the mother who held her dear, the father whose name it is an honour to wear, I refuse your offer."

"Very well; you were foolish to send for me, but perhaps you have forgotten the numerous duties such a position as mine entails. A little while ago you would do anything for Daisy's sake; but now in your selfish love you would keep her with you, to grow up in ignorance and poverty, to sink to a lower level than your own."

"Marcia, have mercy on me! Only give me enough to provide necessities for her—indeed, I ask no more. I cannot part with her."

"Neither can I go from my decision; in future years you will remember that you worked her ruin, and curse yourself for your selfish folly. There is no more to be said; let me go."

But Lena barred her way; her face was white as death, her eyes wildly imploring, as she cried, passionately,—

"No, no; you must not leave me thus—bear with me. My pain has made me mad; but I cannot endure that my child should suffer because of me. See, I give her up to you; but on my knees, I pray you let me have some access to her. It is a mother's prayer. If ever a child had come to bless your life, how could you yield it wholly and entirely to another woman—yourself to be forgotten as one long dead? I will not trouble you often. I—I have learned to be patient," and all the while she knelt there, grasping the other's skirts with frenzied hands, her sweet uplifted face all wet with agonising tears.

"Get up," said Mrs. Denison, sternly, "this is too melodramatic. Bitter the child goes with me or she does not; which is it to be?"

Lena had risen now, the cruel words had stayed her tears, but the anguish in her eyes might well have touched a heart of stone.

With her hands pressed hard upon her breast, she said, brokenly,—

"You are strong and I am weak, I cannot strive against you; but Heaven forbid you should ever know the cruel torture I endure. Take my baby from me. I must endure and live; but, as you deal by her, may the God of the widow and orphan reward you."

"Get the child's belongings ready, there is no time to lose," interrupted Mrs. Denison, and she would not hear the heartbroken gobs which Lena could not suppress as she went away to do her bidding. It did not take long to pack the modest trunk; then calling the child to her, the unhappy mother said,—

"Daisy, you are going away from mamma; but aunt Marcia will be kind to you, and you must try in all things to obey her." Then her courage failed her, and breaking into a wild cry, she continued, "Oh, my baby! Oh, my baby! how can I let you go? My darling, this is worse than death. Kiss me, kiss me, again and again. You will never see mamma any more; but think of her sometimes and pray for her!" She caught the child to her breast, almost crushing her in her frantic embrace; but when Daisy began to cry, she hushed her sobs to soothe her with tender foolish words that mothers use.

Presently Mrs. Denison knocked at the door, inquiring if all was in readiness for departure; Lena, still holding her child close, opened it to her. "Be good to her," she said, in a choking voice, "she is my only wealth, and you are robbing me of her. Go now, my darling—now, whilst mamma has strength to let you. O Heaven—O Heaven!"

But what followed was too painful to record; only as Daisy was carried screaming and struggling to the carriage in waiting, Lena fell prone to the ground, where she lay long unconscious. When she recovered, the night was far advanced; she sat up, and pushing the heavy hair from her brow, moaned out, "Oh, my little one, my pretty one; you will forget me, but I shall go hungering after you all my days;" and then, like Rachel,

she fell to mourning for her darling, and would not be comforted.

That night Daisy Dare slept in a sumptuous apartment; she had refused to be consoled, and had cried herself to sleep. As she lay there, her little features all swollen with weeping, Mrs. Denison came and looked down upon her long and earnestly, until her hard eyes softened, and her thin lips quivered a moment with some passing emotion. Stooping, she kissed the flushed cheek turned towards her, and went away just a little wearily, although she had all that her heart desired.

Years ago she had watched her sister growing towards womanhood and beauty, and been envious of her father's love for her. She was the child of a second marriage, and Mr. Trevanion had been quite an old man when he discarded Lena because she refused the husband he had chosen for her, to link her lot with that of Walter Dare. There had been times when his heart rebelled towards the child of his old age; but Marcia, who was twenty years her senior, never forgave her for bringing what she pleased to call disgrace upon the family, and always fanned the dying flame of her father's resentment into fiercer blaze.

By her influence she compassed that unjust will which bequeathed all his fortune to Marcia, leaving Lena penniless, and he died before he could revoke it.

Then Marcia, a handsome woman of thirty-eight, married Frederick Denison, who was heir to an earldom, and possessed of considerable means. But, unfortunately for her ambitious aspirations, he died shortly after their marriage, so that she remained plain Mrs. Denison, to her great chagrin.

And now, when she, a childless widow, a woman more feared than loved, began to feel her own loneliness, she coveted and wrested Lena's daughter from her; and not one throb of pity did she feel for the poor, young creature lying helpless and hopeless in her shabby apartment—oh! ten times sabbier and more forlorn now than Daisy was gone.

In the night the child woke and cried piteously for "mamma." The smart maid, who shared her room, rose impatiently to silence her, but Mrs. Denison was there before her.

"You can go, Habette," she said, "I will remain with Miss Dare." Then, lifting Daisy from the bed, wrapping her warmly about with a crimson rug, she said austere, "Be quiet; you are a very little girl, but quite old enough to understand what is said to you. If you are good you will be most kindly treated; I will buy you all those pretty toys which children love, but you must remember never to speak your mamma's name to me. She was a disgrace to her family, and you must forget her, because you will never see her any more."

Here Daisy's tears flowed afresh; she did not at all understand what "disgrace" meant, or why her own lovely mamma was never to come to her again; then, being very weary, she sobbed herself to sleep on this woman's breast, which was strangely stirred by her helplessness and beauty.

It was strange that Marcia Denison, who had never loved any creature but herself, should find delight, as the days wore by, in Lena's child; how jealous she grew of the little one's tender memories of "the pretty mamma" who never came now to pray beside her bed or tell her fairy tales "too lovely for anything;" but as the weeks and months went by, Daisy, tutored by her nurse, and being like most children, prone to forgetfulness, spoke more rarely of Lena, and Marcia thought her image had quite faded from the little mind.

But, wise as she was, in this she was mistaken. Often when Daisy woke at night the fair sweet face of her mother rose before her like a shadowy picture, and she would whisper, "Mamma! oh, darling mamma! come back to your own Daisy."

CHAPTER II.

ONCE when she was about ten years old, she had been reading a fairy story to Mrs. Denison, ending with the conventional "they were married

and lived happily ever afterwards," and her aunt said (with gentle hand resting upon the little curly head): "And what will you do, Daisy, when you have married the fairy prince?"

"The sweet serious eyes met hers. "I shall go all round the world looking for my mamma; when I have found her we will all be happy together."

Mrs. Denison frowned.

"Have you forgotten what I told you, Daisy?" Your mother disgraced her family."

"What did she do?" interrupted Daisy. "Oh, Auntie, if she was very naughty, don't you think she would be sorry, and when people are sorry we ought to forgive them." Leaning her chin in her little palm she went on, "But I do not think my mamma knew she was naughty. I can remember just a little how good and kind she was; and she was pretty,—oh so pretty!"

"Hush!" answered her aunt, "you are a disobedient girl; go to your room, and you will take tea alone to-day."

But, for all her seeming harshness, Marcia Denison loved the child with a fierce, selfish, unreasoning love; she lavished all good gifts upon her. But she hated to remember Daisy was not her own daughter, and as the girl grew nearer to womanhood she realised this fact, and never spoke of the past, which she remembered only as a vague dream, but deep down in her heart was the longing desire to find that dear mother who had so disgraced herself that she was an outcast from her family.

"Some day we shall meet," thought Daisy, "and then I shall know her, and she will not be sorry any more, having me to comfort her."

In this wise she grew up, and her aunt, regarding her increasing beauty with wondering eyes, built castles in the air. Daisy should marry well; thank Heaven she had rescued her from her mother's fate. And then the girl loved her as Lena never had done.

On her eighteenth birthday Daisy Dare stood in her dressing-room, waiting her aunt's summons; to-night she was to attend her first ball, and there was small wonder that her cheek was flushed, her heart beating with pleasurable anticipation.

Mrs. Denison, entering the room, thought that she had never been so beautiful. She wore a white gown of some filmy material, there were white roses in her hair and at her breast, and her dark eyes shone with all the innocent happiness of extreme youth.

She smiled as Mrs. Denison entered, asking with a little curtsy, "Shall I do, auntie?"

"Presently; you have no ornaments—see, I have brought you some," and then with deft fingers she fastened a string of pearls about the white throat, whilst she said with a smile, "Pearls are for tears, but there are no tears for fortune's favourite, Daisy, you excel yourself! Let me fasten these bracelets—I want you to look your very best."

There was quite a stir as Mrs. Denison and the young debutante entered, and the elder lady's heart throbbed exultantly. She would live again her dead youth in Daisy's, glorying in the triumphs the like of which she had never known; for, handsome, well-born, well-dowered as she had been, Marcia Trevenar had never boasted a lover until Roderick Denison, to his subsequent sorrow, laid his heart at her feet. Daisy took all a healthy girl's enjoyment in the scene before her, not feeling strange, because, although this was really her debut, most of the guests were well-known to her, she having been accustomed for the past twelve months to attend matinees, picture-galleries, and the opera with Mrs. Denison, who was wont to declare it was a mistake to transplant a girl from the schoolroom to society without any transition stage. "They are always more or less awkward," she said, "and bread-and-butter-misses are out of date."

Daisy's tablets were filling fast, but she had reserved two dances for some favoured mortal, unknown to Mrs. Denison, who was busily engaged in discussing the latest fashions with a fat and somewhat disagreeable-looking dowager. Presently a slight increase of colour, a sudden glad light in the girl's brown eyes, told that the favoured one was near—and he was good indeed to look upon.

Not much beyond the medium height, broad-shouldered and muscular, with a column-like throat, a beautifully-shaped head with close curling hair of darkest chestnut. The face was intensely proud, the grey eyes keen and intellectual, the mouth very resolute.

Advancing to Daisy he held out his hands for the tablets. "You have remembered your promise and saved me two dances," he said, not as one who asks a question, but who states an already assured fact.

"I am later than I intended to be, but then I am a busy man and not my own master. How good you are!" in a lower tone, as he scribbled his initials opposite a waltz and valseviana; "did you know my favourite dances?"

Daisy lifted shy, glad eyes to his. "Yes, it was at the Grosvenor you enlightened me with regard to them; do you forget?"

"I am afraid that I do; your memory is more retentive than mine. I wonder if you will be angry if I say that your gown is perfection, and that I never quite realized how charming you can be until now. It is not a compliment, but downright earnest truth."

"Our dance, I believe, Miss Dare," said another voice, and as her partner led her away, the two young fellows who had been monopolising her rose too. Then the fat dowager said, confidentially to Mrs. Denison,—

"Do you know Oscar Lytton very well?"

"No."

"I am glad indeed to hear that, because you see, my dear, he is the sort of man girls run wild about. But he is a detrimental. The father is a country clergyman and poor; young Lytton is an engineer or something of that sort, and reported clever, but he has nothing of his own, absolutely nothing. I would not let Daisy see too much of him."

"I have no fear for my niece; my will is her law," answered Mrs. Denison, but she set her lips in a hard line as she thought,—

"Lena's story shall not be repeated in Daisy; Freke has already shown signs of attraction towards her, and she shall marry well."

She was too diplomatic to say a word upon the subject to the girl when she joined her, a little flushed by exercise and happiness, but she gave her sweetest smile to a man who had but just entered and immediately sought them out in their quiet corner.

He was tall and dark, with a languid blasé air, and was probably thirty-five or more, at all events Daisy regarded him as "old."

Dropping into a seat beside her, he begged that she would not refuse him a dance on account of his tardy appearance.

"These sort of things," he drawled, "soon pall upon one; I am surfeited with them. Of course you are looking at everything through roseate spectacles, Mrs. Dare; when you have been out a little while, they will weary you."

"I hope not," said Daisy, blithely, "I should not like to think life could ever be tedious, or that I could take my pleasures sadly."

The dark eyes lost something of their languor as he looked on her exquisite, happy face, and he said, as he held out his hand for her tablets,—

"I shall positively forget to be weary, if you accord me a dance."

"Oh, I am very sorry, Sir Grattan, but I have not one left."

Mrs. Denison saw the swift look of annoyance on the cynical face, and gently possessing herself of the pink and silver cards, glanced with apparent carelessness at the long row of initials. Then she deliberately struck out O. L. twice, saying, with a suave smile: "My dear Daisy, you are too good-natured, and young Lytton is too presumptuous; we knew scarcely anything of him. Sir Grattan, I will give you your choice of these two dances."

He smiled languidly, perfectly understanding her tactics, and answered,—

"With Miss Dare's consent, I take both."

"But I have promised Mr. Lytton," Daisy began, distressfully, when her aunt interrupted her.

"I will make you apologies; we do not expect much wisdom from eighteen years old."

The girl was very pale as Sir Grattan Freke

led her away; she perfectly understood her aunt's motives, and was ashamed of her own helplessness. Turning her indignant eyes upon her partner, she said,—

"It was not generous to steal another's dance, or to take advantage of—of aunt's prejudices."

"Where you are concerned, I cannot be generous," he answered, so significantly that her cheek flushed and her eyelids drooped. In her confusion she found no word to say, and the next moment she was whirling round the room with a heavy heart, wondering what Oscar would think of her apparent coldness and discourtesy. Once she dared to look up, only to meet the scornful glances of his accusing eyes; after that she knew nothing until the waltz being over, she found that he was gone. And in this wise Daisy Dare's first ball was spoiled. As they drove home that night, she ensconced in her corner, Mrs. Denison, leaning forward, laid one hand upon her knee.

"Daisy, are you asleep?"

"No, aunt."

"Then listen to me. I do not ask your attention for long. I want you to understand that in future you do not know Mr. Lytton."

"For what reason, aunt?—he is a gentleman!"

"He is also an engineer, and can call nothing his own save that which he earns by the sweat of his brow. I grant you he is well-looking, but I have other views for you; and I do not intend you should follow in your mother's footsteps."

"What was her crime? How did she come to be the family disgrace?"

"She married beneath her, and lived to repent her folly."

And no other word was spoken between them that night; but Daisy brooded over her mother's fate and her own trouble, hoping in her innermost heart that Oscar Lytton would understand how the land lay and not be very angry with her.

"Soon or late we must meet," she thought, "and I will tell him all. He must know I would rather dance with him than any other."

But the reflection did not much console her, and she spent a very restless night, rising late next morning unrefreshed and depressed. Mrs. Denison looked keenly at her as she slipped into her seat.

"You show signs of last night's dissipation," she remarked.

"Yes, I am not yet accustomed to late hours," Daisy answered, smiling faintly, "and I suppose excitement kept me wakeful."

"We will go out presently, a drive will do you a world of good, and bring some colour into your pale cheeks; and to herself she said, "There was no need for fear, Daisy is perfectly safe; but where so handsome a man as Oscar Lytton is concerned one can hardly be too careful."

She was a wise woman, but she did not read Daisy aright, the girl's heart was as a sealed book to her.

She never guessed how, when they rode or walked, the brown eyes went seeking one familiar form in the motley crowd. She knew nothing of the painful suspense which robbed every fashionable function of pleasure for the girl. She would have been horrified had she realised how the young heart quivered when Oscar met and passed them with a formal bow and stern face.

As it was, she congratulated herself that she had "nipped young Lytton's presumption in the bud."

She would part with her niece only to Grattan Freke, or to some other equally eligible party. Daisy's marriage was to be her triumph.

One day in March, she, having business with her lawyer, deposited Daisy at the Kensington, promising to call for her in an hour.

"It is very early yet," she said, "and you will have the place almost entirely to yourself; my business would have no interest for you, and the museum has. There never was a greater lover than you, child."

The girl was well content to spend the quiet hour alone. She was feeling depressed, and fate was too strong for her.

Always Sir Grattan haunted her steps, and she could not be blind to the fact that whenever he joined her friends and acquaintances drifted away

as though acknowledging his superior claims upon her; and Oscar she rarely saw.

She sat thinking of these things when a lady dressed in mourning glided into the room, and stood looking at her with yearning eyes.

She had watched her leave her carriage and followed her in. Now, as she gazed, tears rose beneath the white lids, the sweet face—sweet despite its sorrow and thirty-seven years—grew paler, and the tender mouth quivered, the small hands went out with a gesture of passionate entreaty, only to fall slackly as, with a sigh that was more than half a sob, the new comer sank into a seat.

The sound startled Daisy; she turned swiftly, saw the reclining figure, and thinking that the other was about to faint, hurried to her side.

"I am afraid," said the softly sympathetic voice, "that you are ill; is there nothing I can do for you—pray tell me?"

As her eyes rested on the upturned wistful face something in it made her ask herself, —

"Where have we met before?" but memory failed to supply the answer, and she thrust the thought from her, as her new acquaintance said, uncertainly, —

"I was a little faint, nothing more. I shall do very well, thank you—it was yourself who startled me."

"I! I did not frighten you intentionally. Lean upon me, so; you are trembling still. Oh, I wish I could do something for you."

"You are making me happier than I have been for many years. I—said you startled me; it was your likeness to my lost child which made me so weak. I—I am not often so."

Daisy glanced at the black well-worn dress and cloak, and tears rose to her pretty eyes; something in the stranger's voice and manner touched her to keener pity. "Your child is dead? Oh, I am so sorry! How cruel any reminder of your loss must be."

"No, dear, it has done me good; and I was yearning for a kind word. I am a stranger here, all I ever knew have forgotten me or are dead. I am glad that to-day I return home. Before I go—and I must go now—will you kiss me for my lost child's sake?"

She put her arms about Daisy; clasping her close, she laid her mouth to her mouth, and then, blinded by her tears, she went away out into the roar of the cruel city, whilst her heart made moan, —

"Oh, my child! oh, my child! What recompense shall I have for my loss."

CHAPTER III.

DAISY had been visiting an old servant, who had married with a somewhat disastrous result. Mrs. Denison did not approve such visits, save on the score that "they were safety valves for an impressionable girl's feelings," and had duly commissioned a staid man-servant to accompany her niece.

The neighbourhood was distinctly "not nice," and Daisy always declined visiting it in the elegant brougham. "It seems like insulting poverty," she said, and Mrs. Denison had allowed her to please herself in this as in most other things. On this occasion the girl stayed longer than she had intended, and was startled when she left the house to find that a dense fog had gathered.

"Please keep very close to me," she said to her escort. "I am afraid we shall lose each other, and I am quite sure I could not find my way home alone;" and for a little while she was obeyed.

But the man was country-bred, and had a wholesome fear of the murky streets, so, thinking most of his own safety, he contrived in some way to get separated from "the young mistress."

Once or twice Daisy addressed him, but, receiving no answer, veered suddenly round to find him gone. Her heart stood still with fear; she had completely lost her bearings, and had no more idea of which way to steer than one stranded in an African desert. With desperate courage she went forward, on and on, farther every moment from the blessed shelter of home.

The yellow, ill-smelling fog wrapped her round and about; seemed to penetrate even the thick folds of her mantle, almost suffocated her, and she was tempted to break down utterly, she was now so very weary.

Suddenly there issued from out a shop (the lamps of which were scarcely visible) a big, burly figure—the yellow light glinted a moment upon the hand-bag Daisy carried—the figure lurched towards her, and the next moment she was clinging desperately to her possessions, whilst she sent up a frightened cry for help.

Quick footsteps were heard, she repeated her cry; then for an instant there followed a volley of oaths, a struggle—a blow; the thief was well away, carrying Daisy's bag and purse. The rescuer stood beside her; she could not see his face, but she had recognized his voice, and her heart was throbbing with rapture; she was proud to feel that the man she loved was also her defender.

"You have had a terrible scare," said Oscar, peering through the fog at her, and wholly unable to distinguish her features, "but I do not think you need fear further molestation. If you will allow me, I will take you where you wish to go. I think I could find my way blindfold through the maze of London streets."

"You are very good," she answered in a muffled tone, "and I shall be grateful to you for your fur her assistance; I seem quite to have lost my head. I want to go to Palace-gardens."

"You had best take my arm," Oscar said, in a matter of fact tone. "We shall soon get back to the thoroughfare. And if your people are wise they will forbid you taking such solitary excursions."

"I did not start alone," Daisy began eagerly, and something in her voice made Oscar turn to look at her; the lights from a restaurant showed him the face he loved best on earth, and then his own changed, and his eyes grew stern. When he spoke again his voice had lost all its kindness.

"I am happy to have been of service to you," Miss Dare; but as you have now no further need of me, you will let me call a cab. Mrs. Denison will be growing anxious about your safety."

"If you please," stammered Daisy, "I would rather walk."

"In that case I am afraid you must endure my society a little longer; believe me, I will obliterate myself as much as possible."

They walked for some time in silence, and Daisy in her pain grew desperate; beside which, she was nothing if not honest. Presently she said, in the meekest of voices: "Mr. Lytton, I know you are thinking very badly of me. I seemed to behave so shamefully when—when we last met."

He, hardening his heart against her, answered, —

"Not at all; it is a lady's privilege to change her mind, and Freke is more at home in the hall-room than I—you were wise to effect a change of partners."

"But," she faltered, with tears in her eyes, tears in her voice, "I could not help myself. I have been very wretched since that hateful night—I felt you must regard me as the embodiment of snobbery."

He turned quickly upon her.

"Do you mean that you broke your word to me under compulsion—that Freke won the game by a fluke?"

"I think," said Daisy, demurely, "you must let me tell you my story in my own way. Have I your permission?" and then as they walked (slowly enough now, it must be confessed) she told him of her aunt's tactics and her own helplessness. When she had finished, he asked, —

"And did you care very much? Daisy, dear little Daisy! I have no right to speak; I am a poor beggar with nothing to offer you but my heart and name. I am wholly dependent upon my own exertions for my livelihood, and you have been reared in luxury; but I would labour always to make your happiness, if only you would bid me hope."

And as he paused, she said, with apparent irrelevancy, —

"My mother married against her people's wishes. I do not know now even if she is alive

or dead; I may not speak of her—but aunt calls her 'The Family Disgrace.' Do you think" (a flash of mischief lighting up her eyes), "do you think such crimes are hereditary? because—because—I, oh! cannot you guess the rest. Aunt will be so angry; but, however angry she may be, I shall—" she paused, her breath came quick and deep.

"You will?" he questioned, halting, and with his hand resting upon the little fingers, lying upon his arm, "you will what, Daisy?"

"Love you now and always," she answered, bravely.

To all intents and purposes they were alone. In the rapture of that moment he turned and kissed her.

"Love shall be our talisman; only be brave, sweetheart, and neither change nor chance shall part us."

Then a little later, as they loitered through the dismal streets, —

"Shall I leave you now, Miss Dare? cabs are plentiful on this rank."

She laughed softly.

"Pray consult your own pleasure; but isn't driving rather dangerous on such an evening as this?"

So, forgetful of all earthly discomfort, lost in the Eden of youthful love, they walked on to Palace Gardens.

"To-morrow I shall see Mrs. Denison," said Oscar at parting.

Daisy's face shadowed.

"She will not be pleased, but for my sake, because she loves me, and has always—as she believes—my best interests at heart, you will bear with her displeasure."

"Only be loyal, sweetheart, and we have nothing to fear."

In the hall Mrs. Denison met her; she was both alarmed and vexed, and poured out a whole torrent of questions.

"I have had quite an adventure," said Daisy, nervously. "I lost Grimson, was pounced upon and robbed by an awful-looking man, and rescued from my dilemma by Mr. Lytton. I gave him permission to call to-morrow, if only, dear aunt, that you might thank him for his services. And now, I will run away to dress, and will be down before the first gong sounds. You shall have the particulars of my adventure then."

She ran lightly upstairs, not daring to trust her composure longer, and Mrs. Denison slowly and thoughtfully returned to the drawing-room, inwardly determined that Daisy's charitable errands should come to a speedy end.

Duly the following day Oscar presented himself at Palace Gardens, and after one keen look at Daisy's blushing face, Mrs. Denison decided to see this extremely venturesome young engineer. A handsome, stately woman, she entered the reception-room, Oscar rising to meet her without a trace of embarrassment or *gaucherie* in his manner.

"I have to thank you," she said, coldly, "for the service you rendered Miss Dare yesterday, and I think I may promise you that she shall never again tax your good nature so far."

The keen, grey eyes met hers very steadily; he knew that, if she dared, this woman would treat him as an inferior, perhaps even go the length of offering him a reward, and was prepared to meet her on her own ground.

"I am very glad," he answered, quietly, "that I was near to save Miss Dare from further fright or insult, and I need no thanks. But I am afraid that my present errand will cause you some annoyance. I have to beg your permission to address Miss Dare."

"Sir!" she began indignantly, but Oscar continued calmly, —

"I am well aware that at present my circumstances cannot compare favourably with those of men she is daily in the habit of meeting, and that our marriage must be necessarily delayed; but only yesterday I received a good appointment at New York—my present income is four hundred per annum."

"Great Heavens!" ejaculated Mrs. Denison in horror (such a sum meaning poverty to her), but with a wicked light in his eyes, the young man said, —

"I acknowledge it exceeds my merits, and yet I hope presently to increase it."

"Are you mad that you dare ask my niece to share such a lot?" Mrs. Denison asked, sharply. "It is quite beyond the question. When Daisy marries, her husband will be her equal in birth and fortune."

"I have nothing to call my own, except what I win by downright honest labour, madam, but I claim to be Miss Dare's equal by birth at least; the Lyttons are contemporaries with the Trevenans, and of somewhat more ancient lineage than the Denisons."

Her face was not good to see as she looked on this fearless young fellow, coldly asking,—

"Is Miss Dare aware of your—your presumption?"

"She knows my wishes, and has given me permission to speak."

Mrs. Denison touched the bell and, a servant answering, said,—

"Tell Miss Dare I wish to see her at once," then in silence Oscar and she waited until Daisy, shy and blushing, came into the room.

"I have been both shocked and annoyed by the communication Mr. Lytton has just made to me," said her aunt. "I am told it is with your consent that it was made at all. Is this true?"

"Quite true, auntie," answered Daisy in a low voice. "Last night Mr. Lytton did me the honour to ask me to be his wife, and I said 'yes.'"

"Then it remains for me to cancel that bond; until you are of age you are absolutely and entirely under my control, and long before three years have gone you will have seen the utter folly of the step you would take. For your own sake, Daisy, I forbid this mad engagement!"

"Madam," said Oscar, quickly, "you have no right to dispose of your niece in such a summary fashion! Are her feelings to count as nothing that your ambition may be gratified? Daisy, my darling, you will not accept Mrs. Denison's decision as final?"

The girl moved quickly towards him, her hands outstretched.

"I will be true to you," she said, with a little sob. "Heaven knows I will, but we are young, and can wait for our happiness, and for my sake—for my sake,—struggling to smile—" you will work hard to win fame—not that I care how poor or obscure you may be—but I owe auntie so much. Oscar, help me to be brave and do my duty—my loving duty—towards her."

The proud, austere woman was moved by the tender, innocent words more than she cared to show, and made a concession to these poor young lovers she felt was neither wise nor necessary.

"I am glad," she said, stiffly, "to find that you are not unmindful of me, Daisy, and although I absolutely forbid any intercourse or correspondence between you, I will allow you to make your farewells alone, trusting to your honour, Mr. Lytton not to inveigle my niece into any deception, and to her love, to deal with me as I deserve."

Then she went out, and they stood together in sad silence.

Oscar took the girl into his arms, kissed her sweet, pale face and tremulous mouth; then he said,—

"This is hard upon us, Daisy, and I sail in two days."

"So soon? How long will you be away? And how shall I bear your absence? I will labour night and day to win auntie's consent to an occasional letter. It would not then be so hard to live apart!"

"I expect I shall be gone two years, and I go with a very heavy heart; you are young, and she is merciless. My dear love, my dear love! can I—dare I trust your loyalty?"

"While I live I can love only you," she said, simply. "Oh, do not start your new life by doubts of my affection and my truth. For love's sake my mother lost all; I am not afraid to make her choice mine; but I will not be a drag upon you now, neither will I sin so grossly against auntie as to forget her goodness to me—hard to all others she is tender to me; all I have I owe to her—oh, let us both remember that!"

A warning knock was heard at the door. Oscar drew her closer.

"Kiss me goodbye, wish me Godspeed! How hard it is to part! Beloved, remember that if you fail me, you destroy all my faith in humanity, that you take from me all incentive for labour, kill my ambition, and spoil my life. But I trust you—I trust you! sweetest and dearest, let me hear you say once more 'I love you!' ours has been a brief wooing; and the clouds have gathered all too soon!"

"I love you," said Daisy, under her breath, "oh, come back to me soon."

A little later Mrs. Denison, entering the room, found the girl standing dry-eyed and pale before a window; laying both hands upon her shoulders she compelled her to return her gaze.

"Daisy," she said, "you think me hard and cruel now; the time will come when you will bless me for what I am doing. If I loved you less you should go your own way; being so dear to me I would ensure your future happiness and welfare."

"Riches cannot make one happy," the girl answered with downdropped eyes.

"Ay, but they can help towards such an end; and, whatever poets may say to the contrary, love in a cottage is apt to prove wearisome. Kisses are likely to pall and then grow rare when poverty steps in. Your life, Daisy, is in your hands to make or mar. Sir Grattan Freke only waits an opportunity to offer you his name."

"I will not hear him! Auntie, auntie, it is Oscar I love!"

Mrs. Denison's face hardened.

"In this very room," she said, "your mother long ago defied her father, and received my advice with scorn. You know what reward she reaped—poverty, sorrow, obscurity—the loss of every friend she once possessed."

"Tell me where I may find her," cried the girl, "that I may comfort her, that I may judge for myself whether the choice she made was good or evil."

CHAPTER IV.

DAISY DARE would have been ungrateful indeed had she forgotten all the benefits Mrs. Denison had showered upon her.

In all her life this strange woman had loved none but herself until Walter Dare's own child took and kept possession of her heart. And remembering her generosity, all her care, the girl honestly strove to do her duty to play her little part in her little world, and to mask with smiles the heartache she endured.

But there was a cloud on her bright beauty, and when she believed herself unnoticed her head would droop, her eyes fill, and Marcia Denison waxed angry, knowing her thoughts were with Oscar.

But the girl's gentleness always appeased her wrath, and she thought sagely that in time she must forget—first love is not generally enduring—Oscar was gone and Sir Grattan was as Daisy's shadow.

At the close of a month he found opportunity to speak. Mrs. Denison was engaged with visitors, and he discovered Miss Dare in a conservatory, herself the fairest flower blooming there.

She would have gone, being a little afraid of him, because, for all his languor, there was a certain sense of power about the man; but he stayed her with a quick imperative gesture, whilst he said,—

"I have been waiting for my chance so long, that I should be mad to lose it now it has come. Daisy, I love you—"

But she broke out impetuously "Please say no more; has not Mrs. Denison told you that I am already engaged to Mr. Lytton?"

He smiled in quite a superior fashion. "I heard something about a prior attachment, but from experience I know such affairs are not lasting, and I am willing to risk my chance if you will only give me your little hand for my own."

She looked at him with huge disdain. "Would you really take my word for my bond if I broke faith with an absent lover?"

"Yes, if you broke faith for me; and I should

know how to guard my own. See here, Daisy, I am a man of the world, not a dreamer or a poet, and perhaps my language may seem rough to you—but my love is none the less real, because I have known other so-called loves. There was never any girl I desired for my wife save yourself."

"Please do not say more; I cannot, I must not—listen to you."

His face changed and darkened, but his voice was very even as he said, "I will obey you now, but I shall not cease to hope. I have never yet honestly wanted any gift to be balked of it at last. Little darling, I shall yet live to call you wife."

She confronted him with indignant eyes. "Your words are an insult to me, and you would not dare utter them if Mr. Lytton were here to spare me pain!" and with that she left him.

Mrs. Denison was furious when she learned the result of Sir Grattan's wooing, but she was not a woman to act impulsively, so she sat down to think matters over, and when her temper was well under control, she sought her niece.

"Daisy," she said, "you have disappointed me sorely, but I have come rather to reason with than to reproach you. It is my desire to see you settled and that quickly. I am an old woman,—fifty-seven,—and I may not long be left to guard you. I want to see you some good man's wife."

"Is Sir Grattan a good man?" the girl asked swiftly.

"He is an honourable gentleman, and has outlived the indiscretions of extreme youth. He loves you honestly, and not for anything you may possess or inherit. Child, it is vain to strive against me; if you take your own headstrong way, you lose all that would, under happier circumstances be yours. For no fortune-hunter shall make havoc of any legacy of mine. You have everything to gain by yielding to my wishes."

"Aunt, dear aunt, would you break my heart? Oh, show me some pity; it hurts me that I must oppose you. I who owe you so much more than I ever can repay; but the promise I made so solemnly I dare not break."

"Then I have no more to say!" answered Mrs. Denison, coldly. "I counted upon your affection and gratitude, only to find that they never existed save in my own imagination."

Poor Daisy, her heart grew heavy with its burthen as day followed day, and the relations between her aunt grew more and more strained. It angered Mrs. Denison that the season should close without an official notice of the girl's betrothal; she had so longed for this triumph; others who had not half Daisy's personal attractions had captured rich prizes—she might have done the same but for that unlucky attachment.

They went down to Trevenan House, a quaint old place on the west coast, and hoping that solitude might have a salutary effect upon Daisy, Mrs. Denison had invited no guests, so that they were quite alone one August morning when the papers were brought in.

Daisy took up the *Morning Post* and was apparently soon absorbed in it, but her aunt sat watching her, and thinking with a little thrill of fear how very ethereal she looked.

Suddenly she saw her face change, whiten, and grow rigid with horror; she heard a deep-drawn, gasping breath, and rising hastily went to her side, asking,—

"Are you ill?"

The dark eyes lifted to hers were full of unutterable anguish, the poor, pale lips quivered and vainly tried to articulate some words. Mrs. Denison took possession of the paper and this notice met her glance.

"Terrible accident on the Mississippi."

Reading further she learned that the boiler of the *Texicon* had burst, and every soul on board had been injured or killed; amongst the list of the dead was the name of Oscar Lytton, described as engineer, of New York.

Her heart gave a sudden fierce throb of relief; the greatest obstacle in the way to her ambition was removed. It would be easy now to compass her end. And then conscience smote her as she looked at the hapless girl, supine and silent, with her face as white as driven snow, and her eyes full of dumb anguish.

"Daisy," she said, "my poor little Daisy, do not take this so much to heart; it is very, very sad, but no tears can bring him back again, and you are too young to go mourning a dead love all your life."

She was kneeling by Daisy's side, fondling the hands which were ice-cold, despite the heat of the morning. The girl moved slightly and moaned, but not one tear did she shed. If only she would cry her trouble would be less cruel to bear. But not one tear softened the anguish and horror in the brown eyes, and presently with some labour, she dragged herself erect, freeing her hands from her aunt's clasp.

"Dead!" she said, in a strange halting voice, "dead! and I live! Would to Heaven the end had come for me. No! You must not touch me, aunt—you hated him—it was only I who loved him, and I have lost him. Let me be a little while; I shall soon learn how to bear my trouble, and yet not vex you; only now—only now—I want to be alone," so Mrs. Denison suffered her to go, only wishing with her whole heart that Daisy had taken this new grief less calmly, because there then would have been greater hope of speedy forgetfulness.

And up in her own room knelt the wretched girl, her face hidden in her hands, not moaning or crying, not even praying, only brooding over her irremediable loss, and wondering if this cruel pain must remain with her through all the months and years of her life.

"I shall go mad!" she said, under her breath. "Oh, Oscar, I wish to Heaven I had died in your stead. I wish I had been with you to the last!"

The slow days came and went; Daisy neglected none of her duties; she moved about quietly, listlessly, doing this or that thing as her aunt desired. She did not care then what might chance to her. Why should she? Was not her life practically over?

At last in utter despair Mrs. Denison wrote to Sir Grattan.

"If you love her still, come and prosecute your suit at once; she is too inert and hopeless to fight longer against my will and your wishes; unless she has some new interest to absorb her thoughts and time, she must die."

Without waiting to reply, Sir Grattan travelled down to Trevenan House. Daisy met him without surprise or embarrassment, not even heeding his shocked look as he saw the cruel change her sorrow had wrought on her beauty.

"You have been very ill, I fear," he said huskily.

"No, I am quite well and strong, thank you, but aunt persists in believing me an invalid," and she turned away as though the matter were too slight for further speech. Always she was the same, doing as others desired, sharing their jaunts, singing or playing to command, she seemed unable to act of her own will; and Mrs. Denison thought with anguish, "We must rouse her, or she will die; she is daily slipping from me."

She spoke often to the poor child of Sir Grattan and his faithful love; Daisy listened, or appeared to do so, and encouraged by his ally he determined once again to put his fate to the test.

They were loitering in the beautiful old garden—he and she—when he took her unresisting hand in his, saying, "Daisy darling, I have seen and respected your sorrow, not venturing to speak until now of my own hopes; but the time has come when to hold peace any longer would be foolish and criminal. I say criminal advisedly, because I believe that only through my love and care can you recover your lost self. Dear heart, will you make me happy, by giving your life into my keeping?"

She looked at him with a faint wonder in her sweet sad eyes.

"Do you still wish to call me wife, when you know that for me all love is dead; that dear as was my lover to me in life he is dearer still to me now, and ever will be?"

"I wish it still, being so confident that in the end I shall win you!"

No blush crimsoned her face no hesitation

marked her manner, as she spoke low and dreamily. "You are deceiving yourself; love comes but once in a life-time."

"You think so now; you will be wiser soon; and Mrs. Denison desires nothing so much as to see you my dear and honoured wife."

"Let it be as you will," the girl answered, with that strange listlessness, which at times caused her aunt greatest fear. "You are very good to me—you give me all, I give you nothing; because you see I had only love; and that has gone from me; but I will try to be a good wife to you; if I disappoint you, remember that at least I did not deceive you."

He was content to take her upon any terms, loving her as he had never believed himself capable of loving; and she was the meekest of *fiancées*, suffering his caresses but never returning them; wearing the badge of bondage, because it was part and parcel of her bargain.

The wedding was announced to take place in November; she made no protest, but to those who honestly loved her there was something terrible in her apathy—her quiet endurance of her lot.

Trevenan House was full of dressmakers and sempstresses, who made huge demands upon her time and patience; but no one ever heard her speak sharply; she submitted herself to them, making no suggestions, simply acquiescing in all their arrangements. The mainpring of her life seemed broken, and there were times when, despite his passion, Sir Grattan Freke grew angry and impatient with her, so that it required all Mrs. Denison's tact and ingenuity to pacify him.

The summer was gone; autumn came, wet, cold, dreary; and the wedding day drew on apace. Westwood, the butler, sighed as his eyes followed "the young mistress" to and fro; he had been page to the Trevenans when poor Lena made her *mésalliance*, and he remembered her with affection; she had always had a kindly word for him, and from the day of Daisy's arrival amongst them he had loved the child, first for her mother's, then for her own sake; so he cast about in his own mind how best to help her, knowing that her heart was not in Sir Grattan's keeping.

"Ah! but she is a hard one—the mistress," he said to himself; "she was bitter as wormwood to her poor young sister, and she'd be just as harsh to Miss Daisy if she crossed her will. Well, whether I lose my place or not, I'm going to help her, if I can."

That very day his opportunity came. Sir Grattan, after breakfast, had produced some of the Freke jewels which required resetting, and with them some designs forwarded him from town.

"You know," he said, in a lover-like tone, "I wish you, Daisy, to make your choice irrespective of mine—not now only, but when you are really and truly my beloved wife."

She sat cold and silent, her hands lightly clasped, and her voice was even when she said,—

"Why do you try to bribe me? Do you think that love is to be bought with a handful of jewels?"

Something in her manner frightened Mrs. Denison, who, coming to the rescue, gave her opinion with regard to the merits of this or that design; but not a word would Daisy say beyond,—

"Pray accept aunt's advice: she is wiser in such matters than I."

In a dissatisfied mood Sir Grattan went to town; and being gone, Mrs. Denison took her niece severely to task.

With a sudden wild cry the girl fell on her knees, sobbing out,—

"Aunt, dear aunt, let me go away. I cannot go through with this dreadful thing. I have been like one in a dream; but I have awakened in time. I will not—I cannot marry Sir Grattan. My heart's love lies buried with Oscar."

"Get up," said Mrs. Denison, in a hard voice, "and do not treat me to any more heroics! Are you so mad as to believe I would for a moment allow you to make me ridiculous before my friends? or let you spoil your whole life for the

sake of a dead man who was never worthy you? You have gone too far to break your contract."

But Daisy, kneeling still, sobbed,—

"I have been foolish and wicked; but I will not steep myself to the lips in crime. I cannot truly promise to 'love, honour, and obey' the man you have chosen for me."

"If you draw back now, I cast you off!"

"Then Heaven help me!" and rising, the poor child fled from the house into the drear and desolate garden, where Westwood found her walking to and fro, white, agitated, trembling.

"Miss Daisy," he said, softly; and with that gentle courtesy which always marked her manner towards an inferior, she answered,—

"Yes, Westwood? you want me? Did Mrs. Denison send you?"

"No, miss, no; but I make bold to speak to you about yourself. Excuse me, miss, but I know you are not happy, and I'd like to help you for your mother's sake."

"My mother's sake!—did you know her? Oh, Westwood, if you could only tell me where I could find her!"

CHAPTER V.

"I CAN, miss; but if Mrs. Denison finds it out I shall lose my place, and I've lived so long in the family I should be lost in any other. But I'll risk that for Miss Lena's sake."

"You shall not have cause to repent your goodness; and I will keep my own counsel."

So Westwood hurriedly gave Mrs. Dare's address, remarking as he did so,—

"I know she hasn't moved lately, because I've taken letters occasionally from Mrs. Denison to post for her. I think, miss, they referred chiefly to you, because Miss Maria—I mean, the mistress—never was one to make much of Miss Lena. Times out of mind I've heard her use such cruel language to her that I've wanted to give her a man's opinion on it. Now I must go, miss, or some one will be playing epy. And you promise you'll do nothing rash?"

"I promise solemnly." Left alone, she stood a moment, the colour ebbing and flowing from her face; then she caught her breath with a little gasp, because she had resolved to put the past behind her. Better she should seem ungrateful than she should spoil her whole life by a marriage she loathed. Returning to the house, she met Mrs. Denison's maid, and in answer to her inquiry, learned that she was lying down. So she went up to her room, and having written a few words of farewell to her aunt, put together only such things as were absolutely necessary, and turned her back upon Trevenan House.

The world was all before her; she had no idea what manner of welcome her mother would accord her, but she was resolved, if possible, to remain with that mother, sharing her poverty and sorrows until death came in blessed guise of sleep to them. She had carefully studied her route; it was somewhat intricate, although the journey was by no means long; and she felt happier than she had done for many weeks, as with each mile she travelled her freedom seemed more assured.

At Trevenan House no one gave a thought to her, unless it was Westwood, but when the second gong sounded and no Daisy appeared, Mrs. Denison herself went up to her room only to find it tenantless. Everything was in order, but there was a folded note upon the snowy pillow, and a thrill of fear passed through Marcia Denison's heart as she took possession of it. She had not forgotten the circumstances of Lena's flight. Controlling herself by a great effort, she read,—

"MY DEAR AUNT,—

"Try to think as kindly of me as you can, for, indeed, I love you very truly, but I have awakened from my terrible dream to a real understanding of my position. I have honestly tried to please you, as honestly endeavoured to do my duty towards Sir Grattan Freke. But the struggle is too great for me, and remembering your words, I have resolved to go to my mother, whose address I have fortunately discovered. Please forgive me,

and I hope Sir Gratian will forget one who never could have made him happy, because all the love she had to give was gone from her before she met him. By the affection we have ever had for each other, by all the debt of gratitude I must always owe, write me one little word of pardon, but whatever your judgment may be, remember you will always have the deep, sincere love of—

"DAISY."

Mrs. Denison crushed the note in her hand and her face was awful to see in its rage and malignity. Should Lena win the prize after all? Should so mere a child as Daisy defy and make her ridiculous before the world she held so dear? Oh, she would yet bring the stubborn girl to her knees; she would have no mercy upon her or the mother whom she believed guilty of tampering with her child. A maid came to the door.

"Sir Gratian has returned," she said.

Her mistress veered round sharply.

"Very well, let dinner be served," and after a swift, fierce fight with herself she went down. Without comment she gave him Daisy's letter, hardly plying him when his face grew white and stricken, his voice husky as he asked,—

"What are we now to do?"

"The days of Gretna Green are gone," she answered, with a sarcastic laugh, "and abduction is punished rather severely; but if I were a man, I would not lose my bride so tamely."

"I asked your advice, madam," he retorted, coldly. "Neither sneers nor jibes will avail us much now. Shall I follow her?"

"No; let her alone. If after-to-night you care to make her your wife, matters can be easily arranged. You have only to give out that your marriage is postponed on account of your cousin's death (we all know how dear Lord Somersham was to you), and then wait until the girl is weary of the poverty she undertakes to share with her mother. I know that Lena Dare has only sufficient for her own needs."

He looked at her with horror.

"You would suffer to starve?" he said, "and you are a woman!"

"And consequently wise for Daisy's sake; do you think it is a little thing for me to lose her—the only creature I ever loved? She is good and true, but she has not courage to face a bitter world, and she is helpless to gain her own livelihood. In six months she will be glad to return to us," but Sir Gratian Freke, although he left all things in her hands, was not quite so confident of ultimate success.

Meanwhile Daisy Dare reached Bristol, and after a little trouble found the street to which Westwood had directed her. It was close, dingy and by no means select. It led out from Wine-street, and poor Daisy, unaccustomed to walking alone at such an hour was not a little frightened. But she reached her mother's apartments safely; and, almost sick with suspense and fear, followed the slipshod girl upstairs. There she was left alone, and tapping timidly at the door she heard a soft voice say, "Come in."

With a beating heart she turned the handle; the dim light of a lamp served only to intensify the shadows of the room where a woman sat sewing. She lifted her head as Daisy entered, and a cry broke from her lips as hurriedly rising, she said,—

"Why are you here? Have you only come to mock me? Are you real or some happy dream?"

And before Daisy's astonished eyes stood the stranger she had met in Kensington Museum; a mist seemed to roll back from her memory; she saw once more the golden-brown hair crowned with its sad emblem of widowhood; all that had been vague was clear to her now.

"Mother!" she said, "oh, my mother, I have come back to you, never to leave you any more."

Not one other word could she say; then, not a word could Lena utter in her rapture; but safe in each other's arms mother and daughter tasted the sweets of mutual love; the clinging arms about her neck, the pretty head upon her bosom, appeased the long, long hunger of all Lena's weary years. They could not talk coherently that night; it was almost enough for them to sit gazing upon each other, to give love for love,

in their happiness asking only that they never might be parted any more. But in the morning Daisy told all her story, seeking to hide nothing, and Mrs. Dare listened with indignation.

"Marcia had been cruel to her child," and that, gentle as she was, she could not forgive; and yet she did violence to her own heart when she set before Daisy all that life with her would mean, bidding her weigh well her choice, adding, "I am used to poverty, but with you it is different. I can give you only love and the poor result of my labour—for your sake, my darling, even though it breaks my heart to say so. Heaven will give me strength to do it, if by so doing I can win your happiness."

But with her arms about her, the girl answered,—

"Darling mother, all your life you have been starved of love; and if I could retrace the steps I have taken I would not—because that would mean leaving you lonely," and in the sameword she replied to Mrs. Denison's indignant letter. She could only return, she said, in her mother's company, and with her reply all correspondence ceased.

The new life was hard to her naturally, but she did not complain; with so bright an example of patience before her as her mother, how dare she murmur? Then she set to work to find some employment for herself, and having no aptitude for teaching, she resolved to try art needlework. But most of the shops had a regular staff of assistants; and Daisy's timid applications usually met with very brief and occasionally uncivil replies. But just when she was on the verge of despair, she received a commission from a shopkeeper on the Promenade.

How earnestly she applied herself to the work only Lena knew; she toiled early and late, until her task was finished; and then had the pleasure of hearing it had given satisfaction, and she might consider herself a regular hand. She was often weary; often as she breathed bright, strange birds and impossible flowers, tears rose to her eyes, and all her heart dripped out for Oscar. But she had always a bright smile with which to welcome her mother, and the evenings when they worked together were their happiest times. Only as the winter wore away, Lena, who had long been ailing, developed a terrible cough and grew so manifestly weak that Daisy was frightened, and insisted upon having medical advice.

"Rest," said the doctor, "and nourishing food, is what she requires."

Lena smiled sadly. Rest for her meant starvation; and how could she obtain dainties when their combined earnings scarcely produced necessities? So she went backwards and forwards to school, until one day she fell swooning in the street, and lay for an hour unconscious in the little back parlour of a friendly shopkeeper.

When she reached home she again fainted, and in the morning, although she forced herself to rise, she was too weak to walk. She strove with herself a little while, then turning her face to the wall, wept aloud.

"Leave me, Daisy, my darling, my darling! It matters so little what chances may come to me, because the end will soon follow. Marcia will be good to you; and it breaks my heart to see you looking so pale and thin."

"Mother," she girl said, dropping on her knees beside her, "I answer you in the words of Ruth. 'Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; you are more than all the world to me now that he is gone, and surely Heaven would have no blessing for me, and the world no mercy, if I could leave you alone, sick and in poverty.'"

Lena turned and kissed her.

"For your sake, my child, may my end come soon; but oh! if I could work until the last!"

Day following day, however, found her weaker, wearier; and Daisy's softly-rounded cheeks grew thin, her features more accentuated, until, between watching and working, she felt her strength and spirits falling her fast. If only she had any hope of better things, she would be braver to endure present trouble.

One night she threw aside her work with a sob.

"I cannot do any more," she thought; "it must wait," and bending over her mother a great fear tore at her heart lest she was dead, so still she lay. But Lena was only unconscious, and all night the girl watched unfiringly by her, so that when morning came she was little fitter for work. Her task was not finished until evening, and when she took it home the forewoman met her angrily.

"Through your negligence," she said, "the article is thrown upon our employer's hands; consequently," she added, "you will expect no remuneration, and no further employment."

Daisy looked at her with wide eyes and blanched face.

"I am very sorry," she said, tremulously, "but my mother is ill, and I have had so little time for work; but I will do my best not to disappoint you again."

"It is the rule of the firm never to countenance dilatoriness or accept excuses for work delayed," answered the forewoman, sharply, and Daisy went out upon the promenade, helpless and hopeless.

She tried for employment elsewhere; but it was not to be had; and with a heavy heart she returned to her mother and the one poor room they called home.

What should she do?

They were absolutely penniless, and she had nothing of value upon which she could procure a loan.

Well, the turn of the tide must come soon. The bright spring was even now upon them. She could very well spare her jacket. So with no further thought of self she went out once more, parting with her only warm outer garment for the magnificent sum of three shillings.

I am afraid to say how long these two poor souls contrived to exist upon that wretched sum; but when it was gone and want stared them in the face Daisy sat down and broke into bitterest tears.

The sick woman's lips quivered, and her eyes filled, as she said in her feeble voice,—

"Daisy, darling, I can bear anything but your tears. Do you think I am blind to all your struggles, all your unselfishness? Dear, I hoped never to part with this pledge of your father's love to me; but if he sees he will know and understand. Take it and sell it." Here she drew off her wedding-ring. "Try to get enough to pay your journey home."

"No, no! we will live and die together, and you shall not lose your ring; a day will come when we can redeem it, but we must have food, and so I will pledge it for a great sum as I can; we have come to the darkest hour; the dawn will soon break."

In the dusk of the April evening she stole along Wine-street, striving with might and main to gather courage to finish her errand. There was a keen, piercing wind, and she was very cold, but she scarcely heeded minor discomforts; the ordeal before her engrossing all her thoughts. Twice she passed a shop with its three golden balls, but so many people were going in and coming out that she shrank back in fear and shame, saying to herself,—

"I cannot do it—oh! I cannot do it! and if not, where shall I get bread?"

A little sob lifted the white throat, but she kept it back valiantly, and with a desperate prayer for strength turned once more toward the shop. Suddenly she was caught by the arm and drawn gently, but firmly back, whilst a voice cried,—

"Daisy! good Heavens! is it as bad as this with you?"

She turned her startled face upon the speaker, then courage and composure alike forsaking her, she sobbed,—

"Yes; we are starving—mother and I—and I think she is dying. I wish you had not found me, Sir Gratian, but seeing how perfect has been my punishment for my sin towards you, be merciful and let me go."

For answer he hailed a cab, and bidding the driver walk his horse slowly up and down until he received further instructions, lifted Daisy in, and following, closed the door.

CHAPTER VI.

"Now," he said, "tell me all about it; what has brought you to this pass?"

"Mother worked until her strength failed her, and then I lost my employment. We had not a friend in the world, and so I made up my mind—or tried to—to take her wedding-ring to pawn; but I was ashamed, and it seemed like robbing the dead. It is the only thing she has left that my father gave her."

"But you could have written Mrs. Denison for help."

"I knew it was useless; she would only assist me on one condition,—that was the desertion of my mother."

"But surely the bond between you cannot be very strong; you have been so long apart. Mrs. Denison loves you."

"Yes, and it hurts me to remember how harshly she must think of me; but all my life since I went away with her I seemed to lack something, and always my heart cried out for my mother, whose only sin was her loyalty. I love her with all my heart, and despite our troubles we have been very happy together. For her sake, I ask you to say nothing of our chance meeting. I could not bear Aunt Marcia should triumph over my mother."

"This is no chance meeting," he answered, in his old languid fashion. "I came down just on purpose to see you, Daisy, and Mrs. Denison, being my good friend, gave me your address. I should have been glad if you had sufficient trust in me to appeal to my friendship."

"Oh, I could not—I could not! After what had occurred I felt that you would not wish to see me, or hear of me again. I—I treated you very badly."

"Most badly, when you rather starved than trusted to me; but that is enough of the subject. You are going to let me help you now for your mother's sake; surely you will sacrifice your pride to save her life?"

"Oh, you are most good to me, and I have often judged you so unjustly," she sobbed, and then she, stooping swiftly, kissed the hand which clasped her own so close. "I wish I could repay you."

The blood leapt to his face, but the darkness hid this from her, and when he spoke his voice had lost nothing of its languor.

"You make too much of trifles, and now we must not return empty-handed. Will you remain here whilst I make a few purchases; you will not run away from me?"

"No, oh no!"

Good it was indeed to the poor child to hear once more a friendly voice, to meet the glance of kindly eyes; and never had her heart been so tender towards Sir Grattan Freke as now.

As she sat waiting in the cab, she tried to utter a little psalm of thanksgiving, but no words would come, her soul was too full. But she smiled faintly, when, after visiting several shops, he came to her bearing a well laden basket. What would his aristocratic friends say of "Cynical Freke" could they see him under such circumstances? Giving the Jehu Daisy's address, he sprang into the seat beside her, a little ashamed perhaps of his philanthropy, but happier than he had been for many months. Almost in silence they reached the dingy house, and Grattan's heart stood still as he entered the room which so long had been Daisy's home. What a wretched casket to hide so fair a jewel! What terrible privations mother and daughter must have borne! He glanced towards the bed over which Daisy was bending, and her words reached him where he stood, softly as they had been spoken.

"Dearest mother, there was no need to part with your ring; a friend has come to our help, and please Heaven you will soon be well and strong again. Sir Grattan (here she turned her grateful eyes upon him), 'you must know my mother'."

What a fair face it was he looked upon—fair through all its years, its sorrow and sickness; the man's worldly heart softened as he said, "You will not refuse to accept my friendship, because if through me Daisy lost her aunt, she found you," and then he would not let her talk, but with clever fingers began to spread the feast he

had provided. There was a tender chicken, some jelly, a bottle of fine old port, and all such dainties as were likely to tempt an invalid appetite.

The meal which followed was by no means a quiet one; the visitor had a whole fund of pleasant news to impart, and never by glance or look did he refer to the past, or show disgust at the present surroundings. When he went away it seemed to the sick woman that he had taken all the brightness with him, and she sighed as she turned wearily upon her bed.

"Why do you sigh, mother?" asked Daisy. "To-night has been pleasant."

"I was wishing, dear one, that you could have cared for Sir Grattan; he is generous, and evidently loves you for yourself. My child, my child, I am afraid to think of your future when I am gone—if I could only know that you would be safe in a husband's care—"

"I can never love any man as I loved Oscar," Daisy said, in a low voice, but all that night her mother's words remained with her.

In the morning Grattan came again, bearing choice flowers and other delicacies; he was so kind, so thoughtful, that Mrs. Dare wondered a little why Daisy could not regard him with affection. He so loaded them with gifts and favours that the girl hardly knew whether she was most ashamed or grateful. Other doctors were called in, and for her mother's sake she could refuse nothing that was offered of Grattan's plenty, but always she thought with fear "There must come a day of reckoning between us, and Heaven knows what that means for me!"

In a little while Mrs. Dare showed decided signs of mending, and it needed but change of scene and rest to complete her recovery. She would never be strong, but still she was spared to the child who clung to her so desperately; and save for the thought that her post in the school had long ago been filled, she would have been happy.

Grattan laughed when she spoke of her trouble to him. "Oh you must not work for a long while yet," he said, gaily. "You are to have a glorious holiday, and it shall commence to-day. Philpot says you are strong enough to bear the short journey, and I have taken a pretty little place near the Downs for you—no, you shall not thank me, you know if I deserve any reward, what that reward is."

The gentle eyes met his.

"Yes, I know; but I cannot sell my child, or bid her go against her conscience, and I have no hope of repaying you in other fashion."

"I will run the risk," he answered, quickly. "There is scarcely anything I would not do to win Daisy; and I promise you solemnly that neither you nor she shall ever have cause to repent any confidence you may place in me."

That day he wrote Mrs. Denison telling her of all his doings, of the manner in which he had found Daisy, and he did not spare her when he described graphically the poverty and misery which they had shared so uncomplainingly together. In conclusion he said,—

"If you have any womanly compassion or tenderness you will not seek again to separate your sister from her child. After all, her crime was not a heinous one, and she has suffered much because of it. I have every hope of winning Daisy now, and her love after. For her sake Mrs. Dare's future shall be more pleasant than her past. But if you would spare scandal you will invite both mother and daughter to join you when the former's health is a little more assured. I am coming to town next week, so if you prefer not to write I will call upon you."

But Mrs. Denison was a woman of despatch, and he received her reply the following morning:—

"DEAR SIR GRATTAN,

"When you can assure me that Miss Dare has promised to become your wife, and intends to keep her promise, I will open my doors to her and Mrs. Dare. These are my only conditions. They are more merciful than my niece has any right to expect. I think you scarcely know how hard you were to me."

"Yours sincerely,

"MARCIA DENISON."

With that note in his pocket he drove out to Willow Wood. It was a pretty little place standing in a small garden, surrounded by a high hedge, and just now it was at its loveliest.

The flower-beds were bright with blossoms, the windows twinkled from their nests of greenery, the laburnums and lilacs were ready to blossom into beauty and sweetness, for it was now late in May.

Under the trees lingered Daisy, still wearing her shabby brown dress, having resolutely refused to accept any gift for herself from this most considerate of lovers.

Seeing her Grattan gave the horse and trap into the care of the "boots" from a neighbouring inn, and entering the low gate joined her. She was looking pale and troubled.

"I am an early visitor," he said, taking her little cold hand in his. "I was anxious to know how your new home pleases you, and if there is any alteration you desire."

Then the pent-up pain of her heart broke out, as she cried, passionately,—

"Oh, why do you shower gifts upon us—who never can repay you—who have fallen so low as to be pensioners on your bounty—paupers in disguise! Sometimes I think my very heart will break with all the shame and grief of it, and I am so powerless to help myself—"

"Hush!" he said in an authoritative tone. "Your mother is lying in the breakfast-room and will overhear you. For her sake calm yourself. Daisy, do you hate me so bitterly you will not even allow me the pleasure of serving you?"

"How can I hate you when you are so very good to me? But it is hard to owe so great a debt, and still go on increasing that debt, knowing well it never can be cancelled."

"There is one way, Daisy, in which you can more than repay me."

She knew only too well what he meant. He had a right now to ask for payment; but she was sick and faint as she leaned against a tree, incapable of speech, only conscious that the moment she dreaded had come.

"Will you let me hope, dear, that you will listen to me, weighing well my words, believing that I love you too dearly to urge you on to certain misery? If you will give me once again the promise you gave me long months ago, I am willing to trust to your loyalty, because for your mother's sake you will not fail me; and so long as she lives you shall never be parted any more—she shall be dear to me as even you could wish. For her sake do not answer hastily. I will not press you for a reply. I want you to judge for yourself what is best for you to do. I shall leave here for town to-night. Will you have your answer ready by the close of the week?"

"Yes," she answered, faintly; "you are very patient with me, and I am grateful, oh, so much more grateful than any words can express. Pray, for your sake and mine, that I may decide wisely."

Between his hands he lifted the small, white face, and his eyes were full of a great love as they met hers; then stooping, he kissed her once upon the brow, and left her weeping there. But he did not despair; indeed, his heart was light as he travelled to town, and all his thoughts were full of her. Whatever had been his past record, in whatever else he had been false he was true in his love for Daisy, honestly determining in the future to be worthy even her.

She was very quiet through all that day, and her mother, guessing well what thoughts troubled her, left her entirely to herself, afraid lest any words of hers might bias her decision. At night she could not sleep; restless and unhappy, she tossed upon her bed, warring with her wishes, and what she now honestly believed her duty.

She thought of Oscar and wept aloud, and then her tender heart turned lovingly towards her mother. Years ago that mother had sacrificed her whole happiness that her child's future should be bright; was she too weak, too selfish to make recompense when that was in her power?

If she refused Sir Grattan, Lena must return to the old life, which would be doubly hard now, and had she (Daisy) any right to darken her days, or spoil her lover's future, because her own heart seemed broken? She crept out of bed and

knelt by the window, her face upturned to the serene, star-lit sky.

"Forgive," she whispered, "Oscar, my beloved, forgive me! It is my duty. Oh, Heaven! grant me strength to fulfil it."

Something like peace fell upon her as she prayed, and although she was quiet throughout the two following days, she did not seem unhappy; on the evening of the second, she sat on a low stool at her mother's feet, her chin resting in her hallowed palm. Presently, she stirred a little, and said,—

"Mother dear, I have made my choice."

Lena stroked her hair gently.

"I hope it is for your happiness."

"Oh, yes! I shall be very, very happy, having you always, and Sir Grattan is very good to me."

"But that is not all, my child. Can he ever fill your dead lover's place?"

"Do not speak of him," the girl answered, hurriedly. "It is my duty to forget all that went before, and nothing will alter my resolve. I should like to see Sir Grattan as soon as he arrives—and alone."

"In all things you shall please yourself; but, my dear—my dear—you are surely not doing this for my sake?" "If so—"

"I am doing it because he wishes it, and—and I am not reluctant." A little later she said: "Listen, he is coming. Mother, will you please send him to me here;" and as she stood by the window alone, she trembled a little, and her face gleamed through the gathering darkness like a frail white flower.

Her heart beat so heavily, it seemed to suffocate her, but she kept a resolute hold upon herself, and when a voice from the doorway asked,—

"Are you there, Daisy?" she answered, in tolerably even tones,—

"Yes, will not you come in, Sir Grattan?"

He needed no second bidding, but crossing to her side he said, gently,—

"Are you ready with your answer? This has been an anxious time for me; I have hardly dared to hope, and yet I would not fear."

"I have thought it all over," said Daisy, as he paused, "and have tried to do what seems best for you. I never can be anything but grateful to you for your wonderful goodness, and if affection can satisfy you, I can promise you so much. Honestly I will try to forget that—that I ever had any lover save yourself, and I think I shall not find my duty irksome."

"Come to me, of your own will, sweetheart," and he stretched out his arms to her; without a word she crept into that embrace; she was so weary of strife, and his love promised her rest.

"Kiss me! do you know you have never done that yet?"

Meekly she lifted her mouth to his, giving the desired caress, and as he poured out passionate protestations of love, she cried again and again in her heart,—

"Oh help me to forget! oh help me to do my duty. I am so weak, and life lies so dark before me."

And yet in all, through all, she had the blessed consciousness that henceforth her mother's path would be smooth and pleasant. Did she repent her sacrifice? A thousand times no.

CHAPTER VII.

It was the middle of June, and in answer to Grattan's telegram: "Your conditions are fulfilled," Marcia Denison had written for Daisy and Mrs. Dare to join her. "It is necessary," she said, "that my niece should return to my house (from whence she will be married) as some foolish rumours have been scattered broadcast, and for my own sake as well as hers, I wish to refute them."

So they went to town, Lena in a state of trepidation, being most uncertain as to her reception; but Marcia met her in coldly courteous fashion, resolved to accept the inevitable with the best grace possible.

Then, too, the bridegroom-elect had expressly desired that his fiancée's mother should be treated with all due respect. He was honestly attached to her; and, as he said, Mrs. Denison could well afford to forgive one she had robbed so long of fortune and child. He was impatient of delay, and the wedding was fixed to take place quite early in July, before Mrs. Denison's special friends had left town.

Daisy was gentle and cheerful in these days; whatever sorrow she nursed she obtruded it on none, and Grattan began to hope that he had caught her heart in the rebound; even Lena said to herself, with a little thrill of pleasure, "She is forgetting, and he will make her happy."

Grattan was so generous and considerate that Daisy had been less womanly than she was, if she had not felt a very warm affection for him; but for the memory of Oscar she might even, in time, have learned to love him; and because she owed him so great a debt of gratitude, duty became easy to her, nor did she now think with horror of her fast approaching marriage.

It was at a very fashionable reception she met the Dean of Longheaton; and before she heard his name, something in his face and bearing attracted her attention. He seemed a familiar figure to her, with his broad shoulders, sinewy frame, and crisp white hair.

"I am trying to think," she remarked to a girl friend, "where I have met the dean; I heard Mrs. Dalton address him by his name, but I could not quite catch it; and now I am puzzling my brain over him."

"Oh!" answered the other, who knew nothing of her past, "that is Mr. Lytton, until a short while ago he was only a poor country parson; but some old reprobate whose death-bed he consoled, left him a fortune, and as 'unto him that hath more shall be given,' an influential friend stepped forward and procured the Deanery for him. Pity it did not come earlier, for I understand he could give his only son but a poor start in life; and birth without money doesn't count for much now. Mamma is signalling for me; good-bye; we shall meet to-morrow;" and she tripped away heedless of her companion's pallor, or the lines of pain about her mouth.

Oscar's father! oh, if she dared but go to him and tell him all; if only she dared sob out all her sympathy with him—but she was bound to Grattan now, she had no right to speak. She looked involuntarily towards her lover, and even then it struck her that he wore a troubled expression, that his eyes followed Mr. Lytton anxiously, and a great pity for him filled her heart.

"He is afraid lest I shall remember all and be sorry," she thought, and at that moment her hostess came towards her smilingly.

"May I bring the dean to you, Daisy," she said; "he is quite the lion of to-day, and he bears his sudden prosperity so splendidly. He is a clever man too, almost as clever as his son, so that you should be flattered when he asks for an introduction."

With a fierce effort to maintain her self-control, Daisy said,—

"I shall be pleased to know Mr. Lytton personally," and a little later the dean was bowing gravely before her. If she had glanced then at Grattan she would have seen his face was white as her own, and that there was something very like fear in his eyes.

"I have long wished to know you, Miss Dare," said Mr. Lytton, taking a seat beside her. "I have heard of you often, and in some way our lives seem bound to cross. You knew my son well, I believe; everything connected with him must have an interest for me; no creature for whom he ever felt affection or esteem can ever be wholly indifferent to me. You were good friends once!"

"Yes," said Daisy, in a very low voice.

"More than friends? Do I assume too much when I say that?"

"Hush! I have no right to answer such a question now," she murmured, and lifting sad eyes to his, met his half-pitying half-condemning glance.

(Continued on page 356.)

A BRAVE HEART.

—30—

CHAPTER XIII.

ALTHOUGH Molly Fothergill had not seemed to notice anything changed in Justina's manner, she had been none the less keenly observant of it, and with a woman's intuition she had fathomed something that as yet had not even so much as sketched itself faintly in our heroine's mind. Molly knew that the struggle had commenced, that with a return of strength and health, feeble as it was, Justina was now forcing herself to look to the future definitely and deliberately, that the proud spirit was determining eagerly and courageously to take up once again the heavy burden of labour, that he small weak feet were about to plant themselves again on the hard, thorny road which had proved almost too much for the young creature before the events of the past two or three months, and would assuredly be none the easier to tread in the future, weakened as Justina was by illness and her trouble, which, though as yet unshared by Molly, was none the less a certainty in her eyes.

Molly had always felt that when the moment came Justina would not hesitate in her actions. They had only known one another a very short time, but they had been thrown together very closely in that time, and Basil's sister had speedily learnt to admire and love the beautiful qualities of Justina's mind and heart. She was herself absolutely in sympathy with these qualities; she told her-elf, over and over again, that were she placed as this other girl was, her line of action would be in no whit different to that which Justina had adopted and would adopt. But though she did this it was not possible for Molly's warm, loving heart to rejoice at a state of things which, though so comprehensible to her, were nevertheless so sad also.

The point in Justina's mental attitude which Molly had gauged even before it had made itself known to Justina herself, was the saddest of all the sad things for Basil Fothergill's sister to realize. As has been shown, it had not been long before the secret truth of her brother's great noble heart had been revealed to her. The delicate blossom of love that had sprung up so quickly in his hopes and thoughts and dreams, had been seen almost immediately by Molly's tender, sympathetic eyes, and had brought a pang of pain and a mist of tears as the knowledge came to her.

She had such a great, great love for this big, manly, gentle, good brother of hers, the thought of any suffering coming to him—and though Molly had never known love in its fullest sense, she had enough comprehension to be sure that the suffering would be great—was a real grief to her.

Often and often when she had been supposed to be lost in some merry thought or cheery occupation Molly had been plunged deep in troubled thought and conjecture as to how matters would go with Basil in this the most supreme crisis of his life. There was no harsh thought in Molly's mind for the poor, frail, lonely young creature who was the cause of this sorrow to Basil; it needed no words to let Molly know how innocent Justina was of the power she held over this man's heart, of the treasure she had won, of the pain Basil must endure through her.

Molly would have been cruel indeed to have doubted Justina's innocence in this respect, and, as we have just shown, such a thing was very far from her thoughts. She knew very little about the story of Justina's sorrow. Basil had, of course, given her a slight sketch of the girl's early history, and her hurried, most mistaken marriage. Of the cause of Rupert Seaton's desertion it is hardly necessary to say that Basil Fothergill never spoke, not even to his well-loved sister.

Seaton's dishonour was Justina's honour; no matter what might come, Basil would hold silence on the remembrance of the shame Rupert Seaton had put upon his girl-wife. The fulness of that shame was indeed not known to him;

Justina had not spoken one word to let him know the last, the worst of the blow that had fallen on her. All that Basil knew in this matter was that Rupert had most assuredly absconded, that he had gone deliberately, deserting the girl in the hour of her tribulation.

Molly, of course, knew as much as this, her knowledge had been gleaned through the ubiquitous landlady of those small lodgings, and it was from this same source that both Sir Basil and his sister gathered some small idea of the amount of brain and manual labour Justina had performed in the past year.

There was nothing but pity, deep, tender, womanly pity in Molly Fitzgill's breast at first for the poor slender girl, who was nursed by her care and aid back into life from the very jaws of death itself.

Then love followed on the pity, and this love grew stronger and stronger, even when Basil's secret had been revealed, and the realisation of what that secret must mean to him had come in all its fulness.

Molly felt almost unequal to judge calmly of the situation at times, Basil was so dear to her; and the vague dreams of Basil's future, of his wife and the children that would gather about his knees, had had a sweetness that made the casting of them all away now a bitter thing to do; but Justina was growing slowly but surely scarcely less dear to her, and the very thought of allowing this desolate young being to drift out of their lives—nay, out of their home, was something that Molly had not strength to consider calmly.

That Justina must go, however, was a fact that became a necessity to Molly when the girl's heart had been laid open before Molly's eyes even as Basil's had been, and the secret that was just dawning there had been whispered in Molly's ears.

Those few words spoken in such seeming carelessness about Leam Greatorex and Basil had been the spell that had awakened (all unconsciously as Molly was quick to see) a new emotion, a feeling that could be, and perhaps might be, full of divine joy in realisation, but which must be productive of even greater sorrow and pain than even that which Justina had already endured.

This then was the burden of Molly's thoughts on the morrow after Lord Dunchester had dined at Croome Hall, and sad and grey enough was the atmosphere that hung about the pictures that framed themselves in the warm-hearted, usually merry girl's mind.

She, and she alone, held the key to the story that was about to be worked out, and in justice to her love, in justice to her yearning tenderness over both these two who were so dear to her, she must act in swift and drastic measure to save them both from being drawn gradually but surely into a very labyrinth of hopeless grief and desolating despair.

Justina must go from them, not only out of their home and care, but out of all possible contact with their daily life. As yet, fortunately, this secret that Molly had surprised so swiftly was indeed a secret even from Justina's most intimate thought. The danger to her, therefore, was not so great, the sorrow farther off than it was with Basil.

Molly's determination was made, while she rose and dressed in the morning. Basil would be alone with her at breakfast, for though Justina would have liked to have joined the meal, disclaiming all wish to be considered an invalid, she was not allowed to descend till quite mid-day.

Basil would be alone, therefore, and Molly would start operations at once.

She did not commence, however, the very instant she met her brother. She made no difference in her usual manner, she wanted above all things that Basil should never guess how much she knew of his heart's history. She chattered away briskly about Lord Dunchester, and Basil found much to say about the young man.

"I think he is improving, Molly. He looks altogether better than he did, less rakish, if I can use the expression. There is any amount of good in Philip. I wish from my heart that he

could meet some nice girl who would exercise a real good influence over the lad, and lead him into the paths of a quiet, honest, respectable, domestic life."

"I don't fancy Lord Dunchester would care for that sort of thing, Bay. At least, not just yet," Molly answered, balancing her teaspoon on her finger, and watching this operation with careful eyes and a slightly increased colour in her cheeks; "he is such a boy," she added, almost apologetically, after a second's pause.

"Dunchester is nearly twenty-eight," Basil said, taking up a newspaper. "Time he began to think of calling himself a man."

"There are some men who are boys all their life," Molly said, dreamily; then she put her spoon back into her coffee cup, and stirred it round, thoughtfully. "Perhaps he will fulfil your wish, Bay, and make a match of it with one of Lady Sartoris's daughters. I hear they are pretty."

Sir Basil said, "Perhaps" in a mechanical sort of way; he was reading the paper, and was interested in what he read. Lord Dunchester's matrimonial future had no very great claim on his thoughts.

Molly watched him for a moment, or two, in silence, then she braced herself up, as it were, and went straight into action.

"Well, whether this happens or not," she said, cheerily, "it is a matter of very small importance compared to the other circumstance, which I hope will accrue from Lady Sartoris's visit to this part of the world."

Basil looked round quickly.

"What do you mean, Molly?" he asked, all his interest transferred immediately from the newspaper to his sister.

"I am thinking of Justina, dear," Molly made answer very gently indeed.

The man's face flushed.

"I can see no connection between Lady Sartoris's visit to Dunchester and Justina," he said, not very steadily.

"I think, dear, we ought to see it very clearly," Molly replied, still most gently.

Sir Basil folded up the newspaper very neatly, and then rather inconsequently flung it from him, whereupon it immediately spread itself out in luxurious undisturbedness.

"Will you explain more definitely what you do mean, Molly?" he asked; not coolly, but with a touch of most unusual temper, and also a touch of something like fear in his strong voice.

Molly had some difficulty in keeping her own voice smooth and in preventing the tears from starting in her eyes.

It was so hard to have to play such a part, to seem to be full of nothing but worldly thought and common sense, when her whole heart was yearning with love over Justina, and the mere thought of letting the girl go from her out into the cold hard world again was something that seemed to take the hot blood from her heart! Yet, hard as it was, the part must be played and played more keenly and realistically with Basil than with anyone else.

"I should have imagined you would have guessed immediately what I mean, Basil," she said, almost sharply, her restraint making her voice strangely cold in her brother's ears. "We have arrogated to ourselves a position in Justina's life which we have, after all, no sort of right to. While she was ill and helpless there was, of course, no chance or no immediate reason for our stepping aside and giving place to others; but now—now, when Justina has determined absolutely to leave us, and go out into the world to earn her living, as she earned it before she was taken ill, I consider we should be looking in our duty as her friends if we did not try and arrange some sort of plan for her whereby she would have the protection of her relations, and would not be compelled to be alone and uncared for in the future that stretches before her. This is why I say I rejoice that Lady Sartoris is coming so near to us, for I hope in a very short time to have worked a revolution in her mind where Justina is concerned, and to have pointed out to her ladyship her most palpable duty to her dead sister's child!"

Sir Basil did not speak for a moment or two

after Molly had ceased. He got up and went to the fire, standing with his back to the blaze, his eyes fixed on the carpet at his feet.

"I confess," he said, when he found himself able to speak, "I confess your words have come upon me as a great surprise, Molly. I—I feel almost tempted to add as a great disappointment also, for I had imagined you had developed a real affection for Justina, and to hear you suggest so coldly and so quietly that she should throw herself on the mercy of a woman who has managed to forget her with such convincing force, does not assimilate itself with any thought of affection."

"My dear Bay?" Molly had to rise and walk briskly about the room, otherwise she knew she should most certainly break down in her seeming strength of will and decision. She did not speak for a second or two after that one exclamation, then she began hurrying out her words very quickly.

"You are most unjust to suppose I do not care about Justina. I care for her more than I can tell you. It is because I care for her so much that I have spoken as I have done. You know, Bay, dear, the thought of attempting to keep Justina on here with us indefinitely is one that could never be fulfilled. She has made up her mind to go from us almost immediately. What can we say to prevent her? She is too proud to be dependent on anyone. She would call our friendship charity, and our charity would kill her. She has work to do which must be done. You know all this even better than I can tell you. Yet you accuse me of being unkind, when I am trying only to do that which may be and should be of use and comfort to the child. There is no doubt," Molly said, coming to a standstill after a few moments, "that the proper person to look after Justina is her mother's sister. It is useless for her to hope for aid from Dr. North or his wife, she has alienated herself from them altogether, but, as far as I can gather, there has never been any quarrel with Lady Sartoris and therefore—"

Sir Basil stood in silence.

The wisdom of his sister's speech could not be gainsaid, and yet—oh! the unutterable pain of having to realise this, of having to stand quietly on one side and let another minister to this creature who out of all the world was more precious to him than the precious gift of life itself.

He had, of course, known that something of this sort would come, but he had also had a sort of unexpressed hope and feeling that when it did come and they would be called upon to hear from Justina her determination to draw herself from their generous care and love, that Molly would range herself on his side, and in her vigorous yet tender way settle the question once and for all by absolutely refusing to let Justina go, however much she might wish to do so.

Now, however, it was Molly who was pressing the question even before Justina had said a word, and though this fact gave Basil anger as well as pain, his strong sense of justice made him see that Molly was only acting as every practical wise person should act under the circumstances.

To keep Justina at Croome Hall for the rest of her natural life was absolutely impossible; to try and prevent her returning to the burden of her toil, quite as impossible. To endeavour to lighten that toil, to place her in surroundings that should soften and sweeten the bitterness of her lot, had been all that had remained to him to do; and now Molly with her cold, curt, common sense, was showing him that even this small pleasure must be denied him, since Justina's aunt was coming on the scene, and was without question the proper, in fact the only, person to manipulate this question of the girl's future.

It was all full of practical common sense but it was all very very hard, and strong man as he was, Basil Fitzgill winced as he pictured up the immediate future with Justina gone out of his life, out of his care, out of the shelter and tenderness of his great love.

So strong was the pain that the mere thought of this brought, that Basil could not endure further conversation on the matter. He said nothing to his sister, he only turned from the

fire, and went slowly away to fight out the agony that lived in his heart alone and unseen.

Molly watched him go, with a mist of tears before her eyes. She knew so well all he was suffering, and indeed, her own pain at this moment was little less than his—to know that he was in such sorrow, and yet not to be able to give him one word of true comfort, one whisper of help or hope! It was a grief greater than any that had come as yet into Molly Fothergill's bright young life.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was speedily rumoured about the village that Lord Dunchester was going to entertain a small party at his rather tumble-down old country house, and that a certain amount of fresh festivities for the Cromemurth young folk might reasonably be expected.

Beatrice Somerset was enchanted at this news. She cantered across the common one morning about three days after Miss Grestorex's visit to Cromemurth Hall, on purpose to entice Leam out for a ride, if possible, and then to chatter and comment on what kind of entertainment Lord Dunchester would give them.

Leam was writing in her own small sitting-room when Miss Somerset was announced. She looked very handsome in her morning gown of serge with silver belt about her shapely waist and neat linen collar and cuffs at throat and wrist. She possessed very beautiful hands; not small, but very well shaped and of an exquisite whiteness.

Beatrice often declared laughingly and yet with sincerity that Leam would have inspired the dignity and respect she always received if nothing had been seen of her but these beautiful white hands.

She declined to ride with Miss Somerset; but not ungraciously.

"I am going with the Fothergills to the Dunstanley meet to-morrow, and I want to be quite fresh for that," she explained.

"Is Molly going too? How jolly!" Bee Somerset exclaimed. "It is such an age since we had a good day's hunting with Molly. I suppose Mrs. Seaton must be much stronger than, Leam."

Miss Grestorex frowned almost imperceptibly.

"Between you and me," she observed, as she sat down again to her writing table and moved her hands about among her papers, "I don't fancy there has been so very very much the matter with Mrs. Seaton. I saw her the other day; she looked remarkably well, I thought."

"Oh! did you see her, Leam? I have been longing to know what you would say about her. Isn't she lovely?"

There was not much discriminating capacity in Beatrice; at least there had been no necessity for developing it as yet. She was so simple and so fresh and so young that she had no knowledge of the art of dissembling; and though, of course, she was conscious of broad effects such as pleasure and sadness, still the subtler, the less defined emotions which thronged the breast of a woman like Leam Grestorex were quite unrevealed to her. The answer, therefore, that had lain lightly on Leam's words as she spoke of Justina was quite lost on Beatrice.

"Is she not lovely?" she inquired, with warmest enthusiasm. "I have never seen anyone so beautiful as Mrs. Seaton."

"You have not seen very much, you must remember, my little Bee?" Leam said, with an effort at playfulness, yet with that faint bitterness clinging to her voice.

"No, of course not," Miss Somerset agreed. She had seated herself edgewise on a chair, and was beating her habit skirt lightly with her whip.

"Still, after all, there are others who have been nearly all round the world, and they think as I do about Mrs. Seaton. Papa declares she is a revelation to him, and Dr. Wyllie says she reminds him of some wonderful Greek head of some very long time ago, and Sir Basil—"

Leam's hands moved sharply for an instant, as though jerked by an unseen force; then they were still, and she was smiling.

"Well, and what does Sir Basil say, eh?"

Miss Somerset laughed.

"Well, to tell the truth I don't know what Sir Basil says about Mrs. Seaton's beauty; but I think I do know what he thinks. When I was there yesterday I could not help noticing how he looked at her whenever she spoke or moved; and do you know, Leam, she did look a dream yesterday. She is so very slight, and she looks so delicate, her face is like a beautiful flower, and oh! her eyes. I simply cannot take my eyes away from them, they seem to magnetise me!"

Leam leaned back in her chair.

"Well, I think the sooner Mrs. Seaton takes her departure the better. If she is going to have such a wonderful effect on our little busy Bee," she laughed, but not very heartily.

"Oh! she is going very soon; she told me so yesterday."

"Is she going to rejoin her husband, or is he coming down to take her away?" Leam made this inquiry in a languid tone of voice.

"Oh! I don't know anything about her husband; I have never heard his name mentioned. I have not thought much about him either. She does not seem a bit like a married woman, she is so young. Why, she looks quite as young as any of the girls here."

"Have you got any news, Bee?" Leam asked, in a cold listless sort of way. She was annoyed beyond measure by all this eulogy of the guest up at Cromemurth Hall. She determined to put a stop to it without any hesitation.

"I came to you to know if you could tell me anything. Have you heard, Leam, is Lord Dunchester going to give a ball? you know, of course, his visitors have arrived already."

"A ball!" echoed Miss Grestorex. "Poor man, I should think it will be quite as much as he can do to pay his bread-bill. You know he is a pauper, Bee."

"He is very nice!" remarked Miss Somerset; "and I call him handsome, too. I hope he will give a dance, Leam."

"What a baby you are, Bee!"

In fact it was useless to get cross, or to indulge in sneers or sarcasm with Beatrice Somerset; she understood nothing but the bright and pretty and pleasant side of life. She was a veritable child, a "sunbeam," as Jasper Wyllie had christened her, in her heart; but, for all that, she was by no means soulless, or the feather-headed unintellectual creature that Leam half contemptuously classed her sometimes in her thoughts.

"I hope I shall be a baby a long, long time," she cried, rising laughingly from her chair. "Now I must be off, Leam, I have disturbed you for nothing; we shall meet to-morrow at Dunstanley, and I hope we shall have one of our old magnificent runs. And I am so glad Molly is coming, it will be like old times; for, although I do like and admire Mrs. Seaton so immensely, things have not been at all like they used to be since she has been at Cromemurth."

She kissed Miss Grestorex lightly, and danced as lightly out of the room.

Leam went to the window to watch her mount and canter past. As the pretty vision flashed by Leam moved back to her seat at her writing-table; her brow was clouded, and her mouth looked hard and set. She had passed through many uncomfortable moments in the past three days, and she was now in a curiously restless, and yet at the same time sullen mood.

Those faint vague thoughts that had flitted like phantoms across her brain in the past, had incorporated themselves during the days that had just gone into a purpose, a determination, a desire, and an ambition that was little less than a passion.

To be Basil Fothergill's wife, to reign as mistress of his home and his position, to demonstrate to her grandmother the fact of this social success, to set aside the question of her future, and to emerge from her present chrysalis state in the full splendour of a marriage with such a man as Basil Fothergill.

Leam hardly knew herself in her new guise. She was or had been so used to meet all the moves in life with a calmness of frigidity, that this storm of emotion that had suddenly rushed

over her unnerved her, and aroused her anger against herself.

Yet she was true to herself, she was not the woman she had been; one glance at Justina Seaton's beauty, one glance at Basil Fothergill's face when in the presence of that beauty, had metamorphosed her whole self, had changed her very self of selves, as it were. The burning fire of jealousy ran hotly through her veins. The restless fever of love, an unknown sensation to her, now moved her every impulse.

She had lost her proud, cold quiescence; she dared not let herself imagine a future without those things that had shaped themselves into a passionate desire. To be Basil Fothergill's wife. The very words, if whispered to herself, brought a thrill to her heart, set her pulses beating high, and yet she knew so well that her path would be no easy one. The man she determined to win was not free to be won as he once was; it would be a long hard struggle, perhaps, but still she would not falter. The goal for which she worked was a great one, she would not let herself be discouraged, even by so formidable an obstacle as the fact, undoubted and impossible to be set on one side, of the living existence of another woman whom Basil Fothergill loved with all the force and truth and fidelity of his manhood's heart.

No, she would not be discouraged, after all; her rival, beautiful as she was, was not a free woman. Why then should Leam fear her? Why not put her aside once and for ever with the contempt she deserved?

Lord Dunchester lost no time in coming over to Cromemurth Hall to consult Molly on the question of the entertainment he should offer to the inhabitants of Cromemurth.

The day he called happened, unfortunately for his plans, to be the day of the Dunstanley meet. Molly, at Justina's eager request, had finally agreed to go with Basil to this meet, but she had gone under much protest.

"You will be so dull. I don't want to go," she had declared, and Justina had answered with a touch of imperativeness that enhanced her loveliness,—

"You shall go, Basil wants you; and as for me, I wait you out of the way. I am going to have a long day at my work."

"Impertinent!" Molly cried laughingly, but her bright face clouded over at the mention of this work. Despite her brave attack on Basil, despite her brave determination to do nothing to stand in the way of Justina's plans, Molly found her position a very hard one to carry out, and as the time passed and she felt the moment draw nearer and nearer for Justina to announce her departure Molly's heart grew sadder and sadder. If she had not learnt to love Justina for her own sweet sake, there was the fact that Basil loved this girl, and that gave her a place in Molly's heart apart from anything else. But with her own love added to all the rest, the future was indeed a bitter and hard one to have to face.

Justina, knowing nothing of the struggle going on in Molly's mind, was eager to get once again to her work. She shrank from the thought of leaving her friends, and even more still of the pain she must give them by going; but what else lay before her? Her strength was returning slowly but surely, and as vigour crept back into her frame, so came also the yearning desire to get to her task to try and work off that mountain of dishonourable debt which Rupert's cruel shame had left on her shoulders.

She watched Molly go this day with a smile and a sigh.

"Only a few more days," she said to herself as she was alone in the quaint, pretty, drawing-room. She had unpacked the volume of her old manuscript, and it lay before her in a great pile on the table Molly had spread for her use. "It will be hard to go; and yet I must—I must."

She sat for a long time thinking, her face shaded by her hand. She winced even in her thoughts as remembrance of her husband's last cruel act, his desertion of her and the method of that desertion returned to her mind.

She shivered as she realized what a terrible



JUSTINA WINCED EVEN IN HER THOUGHTS AT THE REMEMBRANCE OF HER HUSBAND'S LAST CRUEL ACT.

miserable trial must have been hers if her long illness had been endured alone unaided by Basil and his sister.

There had come into Justina's heart a great horror, a greater contempt for the man she called her husband. To know he was gone out of her life, out of all chance of daily contact with her, was in itself a relief that had something of joy in it, and yet beyond this relief there lurked a nervous fear. She dreaded she knew not what; she was only certain that fear of Rupert and his future actions must be with her all the time. The words Lord Dunchester had spoken the night he had dined at Croome about the man St. Leger had awakened this fear in all its fullness.

There was nothing to connect her husband with this chance companion the young Earl had met in Paris. On the face of it it was highly improbable Rupert would have remained in Paris or indeed anywhere so close to England, having always the possibility of being traced and discovered, either by her or through her, so clearly before him; and yet despite this, Justina's heart had given a painful throb of fear and dread when Lord Dunchester had in a few light words sketched out a sort of picture of the man whom he called by the name of St. Leger. The picture was one that fitted exactly to the character of Rupert Seaton, or to anyone of the type of men with whom he had been so intimate the past year.

Justina grew cold as she let her imagination conjure up all the possibilities of mental anguish that thought and knowledge of her husband's nature aroused so easily.

Should she ever know a day's real peace? While he was with her it had been bad enough, but with him gone from her, out of reach of her influence, thrown into a section of the world that would encourage and help him in the cultivation of his viciousness and dishonourable dealings, who could say what further shame might not yet come upon her through him?

Big hot tears rolled down the girl's pale cheeks as she sat there thinking.

"If it were all over and done with," she said to herself, wearily.

In such a moment as this all the pleasure, the real happiness brought to her through the sweet, true friendship she possessed, seemed to vanish altogether, she remembered nothing but her troubles.

"And I must meet Aunt Margaret, and submit to her questioning, and her probings, and her criticism. Oh! that will be even harder to bear than all!" she added, after a little while.

Work was not easy to her in this mood; she left the table and moved about the room to distract her thoughts. She found herself gazing aimlessly and mechanically at all Molly's treasures; and at last, when she awoke out of the curious blurred mental phase into which her brain often fell after excessive working or too great a strain of anxiety, she found herself standing looking down on a big portrait of Leam Greatorex in all the panoply of her court garments. A picture of a regal, handsome, queenly young woman whose magnificence nevertheless gave a sudden chill sensation to Justina's quivering and deeply moved heart.

"And for her there will be happiness, the truest, sweetest happiness a woman could ever hope to know in this world. No shame, no dishonour, no desertion; wife to man who has the heart of a king, a soul of an angel. Oh! I envy you—I envy you, Leam Greatorex. Your heart will never be torn with anguish as mine has been. Life will be full of sunshine and sweetness for you; when you are Basil's wife you—"

She moved abruptly away from the picture, and suddenly put her two cold hands over her trembling lips as though to hush the cry of pain that would have escaped her. Her eyes were blinded with tears, her brain surged for an instant.

The agony passed after that instant, but it left its trace, and Justina realised the full truth of what had happened then, realised that sorrow in a new and a sharper form must be added now and always to the burden of trouble and bitter-

ness which, as Rupert Seaton's wife, it was her lot to bear.

Love with all its majesty, its power, its passion of sweetness and joy had come suddenly into her heart—love for one she must never love; love that, having shown her its exquisite beauty, its divine power for a single instant, must be torn ruthlessly from her heart and set aside from her for ever, to be won and shared by another woman.

(To be continued.)

In the northern part of Peru, in what is otherwise an arid desert, the celebrated "rain tree" grows. This species, *batas vaperio*, though not large or of much commercial value, is a veritable South American wonder, having the extraordinary property of condensing what little moisture there is in the atmosphere so as to cause a continual mist to exude (seemingly) from its leaves and branches.

A Scotch engineer is said to have solved the problem of making the mill run with the water that is passed. It is reported by a Glasgow paper that a resident engineer has devised an arrangement by which all the steam used by an engine is returned to the boiler. As a result, it is said that as much energy can be got out of one ton of coal as is now secured by the consumption of seven tons.

An ingenious method of capturing adult mosquitoes in the house is in extensive use in some localities in New Jersey. It consists in nailing to the end, or rather the top, of a stick the lid of a small tin box, such as a yeast powder-box. The stick must be long enough to enable the operator to reach the ceiling, and the tin cover of the box is nailed to it in an inverted position. Into this receptacle is then poured a tablespoonful of kerosene, and the mosquitoes at rest upon the ceiling are easily trapped by simply placing this kerosene cup under them and close up to the ceiling. In their endeavour to escape they fall at once into the kerosene and are killed.



"YOU MUST ALLOW ME TO ACT AS YOUR GUIDE!" SAID MARK HERNCastle, ASSISTING THE SLIGHT, HOODED FIGURE TO ALIGHT.

EVANGELINE'S LEGACY.

CHAPTER III.

FOUND!

It was the evening of the next day—the day following that one on which the funeral had taken place at 17, Thistle-street, Fulham, and Mrs. Loraine sat alone in her sitting-room upstairs, which looked out upon the street.

She was dressed quite simply in a neat-fitting black gown, with white cuffs and collar; and her heavy brown hair was wound into a knot low at the back of her head.

Her face was very handsome; she was still young; but the lines about her eyes and her mouth told of the trials of life which had already fallen to her lot. Surely her share of them must have been more than an ordinary one?

Mrs. Loraine, in these days, rarely smiled.

She heard wheels, started, and looked out of the window.

A private brougham had stopped at No. 17, and presently Mrs. Catt, throwing open the sitting-room door, announced "Dr. Ferria."

He was a tall and powerful-looking man, past the prime of life; of somewhat rugged appearance; of a somewhat stern cast of feature; yet with a pair of blue-gray eyes, kindly enough, beneath their bushy, penthouse brows. His forehead was ample; his jaw was square; there was something about the whole man, his patients said sometimes, which was wont to inspire one at first sight with feelings of trust and confidence.

He was dressed for the evening, and was evidently due elsewhere than in Thistle Street, Fulham.

They shook hands like two old friends.

"Sit down," she said, gently. "Do not be in a hurry."

"But I am in a hurry. I am dining at Putney

this evening," he answered. "However, I could not pass through this neighbourhood, you know, without looking in for a moment to see how you were feeling after the ordeal of yesterday. I was coming here last night, but was urgently called in another direction."

"Yes," she said, sighing; "it was a hard day for me—a very hard day."

"How did you bear it, my dear?" he inquired kindly, as a father might speak to his daughter.

"On the whole, pretty well. I was ill after it was over," she said. And she told him how she had been tried.

"No wonder!" was the great doctor's brief comment. "This!" added he, tapping his shirt-front on the left side.

"Yes," she answered; "nothing more."

"Ah!" he rejoined; "nothing more! You must be careful—indeed you must. Oh! my child, my child!" he went on abruptly, with something like a frown knitting his shaggy brows.

"What are you going to do now? You will ruin your health utterly, will wreck yourself bodily and mentally with this restless longing, this ceaseless plotting and scheming, this unholy thirst for vengeance. Forget it, child; forget it all; and shape your life to a different course. How often must I remind you that my home is waiting for you? Come to it, and find peace."

"I cannot—I dare not!" she answered gloomily; "you know yourself that I cannot, so long as there remains a shadow of that horrible doubt! I am convinced of the truth myself. I want to prove the truth to the world. Dear Dr. Ferria, you remember our compact—we must abide by it."

A light seemed to kindle upon the man's earnest face.

"Remember it!" he echoed. "Do I not? Why, remembering it, I am sometimes almost tempted to pray that you may be wrong after all; that there may be no truth to prove to the world beyond that it already believes."

"Then would my revenge become impossible," said Mrs. Loraine, wearily.

"So much the better for you," was the doctor's answer. "If you would forget it—if you would bury every shred of recollection of the past and accept the new chance of happiness I am now holding out to you—a good home, comfort, money, luxury, position—you would be a different, a happier woman, believe me; you would make me the happiest of men. My step-sister Lucy—Mrs. Maclean—the simplest and sweetest-natured soul alive, is waiting to know you; she has heard from me your history; she is not much older than yourself, and she is ready to abdicate in your favour. She is devoted to me—regards me, in fact, as a father, for I am the only parent she has ever known—and consequently for my sake she will do anything for you. Say the word—forget the past—and come!"

"You are the noblest of men," she said, with bowed head.

"Nonsense! Do what I want you to do, and then——"

"Oh, I cannot! I dare not!" she moaned; "it is ungenerous to tempt me. For my children's sake I must find out the truth. Moreover, I have gone too far on a perilous road; I have done too much; I cannot now turn back if I would."

"You must turn back—or stop," said he gravely, "if the truth prove contrary to what you hold it to be."

She shook her head and smiled—a bitter smile. She knew that she was right; that right if not might, was on her side.

"Well, the work of ferreting is still going forward," said the stalwart physician, checking a sigh. "I may bring you news at any moment, my dear—so cheer up!"

He drifted then into talking of the children, and mentioned that he was about to change the prescription for the little boy's tonic. Shortly after he took his leave; driving off in his brougham to his dinner-engagement at Putney.

At parting, Mrs. Loraine had kissed the doctor's hand, assuring him again and again, with

tears choking her voice, that he was the best and noblest of men.

"You must not tell me that so often—it isn't true, you know," he had returned bluntly, with his own kind, peculiar smile. "Besides, in the first place, I shall become vain; secondly, my motives are purely selfish ones, as you are aware. Don't lose sight of that."

A few days later, at about the same hour of the evening, the brougham of Dr. Ferris, of Portugal Square, again stopped at the door of 17, Thistle Street, Fulham.

It was a sultry evening with a dull red sunset, and copper streaks athwart the hazy blue of the sky. The gaieties of the London season, though drawing to a close, were still well to the fore. It was the hour when Park and Row were deserted—or rather given up to the common crowd—and all the gay rich world was flocking to dinner, theatre, or ball.

The distant roar of wheels was incessant; now and then a hansom, the occupant or occupants thereof in evening garb, would come rattling even along Thistle Street on its way to the Barnes or the Putney neighbourhood.

The windows of Mrs. Loraine's sitting-room were open to the air; and she sat near them, with a book on her knee. But she was not reading. She looked pale and listless; there were dark shadows beneath her beautiful eyes.

The children were playing on the floor at her feet, with handsome picture books and other expensive toys—principally the gifts of Dr. Ferris. The little boy was better; it was one of his good days; and consequently he was not so fretful and hard to amuse as usual.

The instant the Doctor entered, the children, Vangie and Phil, scrambled up and ran to him; whilst Mrs. Loraine discerned immediately that he had tidings of moment to impart.

Her languor vanished. She rose excitedly to her feet. She met her friend in the centre of the room, saying, before he could open his lips,—

"You have found something—I can read it in your eyes. Speak! Pity my suspense!"

"You must be calm. I will tell you nothing if you are not calm," he said.

He spoke very kindly, very gravely, and put his arm round her to give her support. Yet he knew that his dream-castles had collapsed, were utterly destroyed, and that the sweet hopes he had cherished for so many months past had now melted like ghosts into thin air. He had brought with him, as it were, the warrant for his own destruction; and the woman he loved so nobly and so well could never now be more to him than she was already. No! never now. The dream was over! Until death they must remain friends—friends and nothing more.

"I am calm," she panted. "See! here is my pulse—I do not tremble. Speak!"

He got her wine and compelled her to drink a glassful. Then without further delay, perceiving that delay was perilous, he pulled out a pocket-book and placed it upon the table.

In the after days he confessed to her how fiercely he had been assailed by the temptation to keep his discovery secret, or to swear to her before his Maker that the contents of the pocket-book were valueless.

He would have done anything, ventured anything, no matter how hazardous, for her sake; but he loved her too well to play her false. He loved her; he could not deceive her; albeit by deception he might ultimately, if unlawfully, win her.

"Yes, my dear, it is found," he said quietly. "A copy of it is in there."

"Let me see it," she cried wildly. And snatching up the Doctor's pocket-book, she, with quivering hands, began to unfasten the clasp.

"You will make mamma ill, Dr. Ferris," said the little girl, in her serious, unchildlike fashion, looking up with her soft dark eyes into the doctor's rugged face, and plucking at his coat as she spoke.

"Dear little soul—my sweet little Lina!" he murmured tenderly, patting her pretty head.

Meanwhile the little boy, seeing that something was amiss, began to cry as fretfully as was his wont. His sister Vangie paced him in her wee, childish way.

In trembling haste their mother extracted from the pocket-book the single document it contained; and with hungry, fevered eyes she read the paper quickly through from the first word to the last.

"I thank Heaven! I thank Heaven with all my soul!" she was trying to say in her joy; but the old pallor overspread her face, she gasped, she closed her eyes. With a stifled shriek her hands went upward to her heart, and the next moment her head, like the head of a dead woman, was resting upon the Doctor's breast.

Late on one evening, towards the end of that same month of June, it happened that Sir Philip Wroughton sat alone in his library at Moscourt Priory.

He was looking fity through a pile of old magazines, reviews, and newspapers, which represented the accumulation of many weeks.

He had just returned from one of his desultory wanderings in foreign lands—he was rarely at Moscourt Priory—during which he had seldom taken the pains, even when at hotels he did chance to come across them, to glance at English newspapers.

He was no politician; his interest in the politics of the day was of the languidest description, he always declared.

The reading-lamps were lit. The great mullioned window was open. The broad waters of the Wane beyond the park flowed tranquilly along in the purple hush of the summer gloaming.

The pollards by the river-edge whispered in the breeze; the stars were dimly streaking themselves over heaven's vast land.

Sir Philip Wroughton took up a recent *Times*, and ran his eye leisurely down the first column of the first sheet.

Presently he leapt from his chair, and stood with the paper crushed in his hand, dumb-founded for the moment at what he had just read.

It was the notice of the death of Evangeline Brooke.

"Brooke,—June 9th, at 17, Thistle Street, Fulham, Evangeline, only daughter of Jasper Brooke, of Marley Lock, near Marley-on-the-Wane, aged 26 years."

"By Jove! how fortunate," he muttered at last. "This is rare luck indeed. I shall hear, I suppose, from Yates and Dodgson now the poor little lass is gone. By-the-bye, the poor child was not so very *petite* either; now I come to think of it; though I fancy, in spite of her healthy looks and apparent strength, she was always a trifle delicate," he mused aloud. "I wonder whether she kept the affair a secret to the last?—and I wonder, too, whether the old chap up at the Lock yonder ever got an inkling of the real facts of the case? I must sound him; must try to find out to-morrow. I wonder those lawyer fellows haven't written. By Jove!" he cried again, "it's a real mercy—nothing better could have happened—deucedly hard-up as I am just now!"

On the next morning Sir Philip Wroughton, as he expected he might, heard from his solicitors in Holborn.

They wrote to apprise him that they had, from a certain quarter, received information to the effect that the four hundred a-year would no longer be drawn as usual; for the person who had hitherto withdrawn, in quarterly instalments, the money from the custody of Messrs. Yates and Dodgson, was dead.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER MANY YEARS.

"A ROUGH night, Davy?"

"Ay, roughish; Master Mark."

Master and man were in one of the upper store rooms of the mill; and the former, having just finished supper, had come to give an order which had been forgotten to the men, and to have a last look round the place before going indoors for the night.

Davy Crocket was foreman to the Hencastles, and had, in Mark's earliest days, carried the

youngster about the mill and to and fro over the mill-tail; to show him the great stones crushing the wheat, or to let him listen to the roar of the water as it turned the ponderous wheel.

Matthias, Davy's wife, with a girl—a relation of her husband's—under her, was indoors servant at the Lower Mills. The couple had been brought up in the mill-yard together, and had served in their youth with Mark's grandfather.

Mark's own father had now been dead for some few years past, and the mother herself, a good and faithful wife, had not been able to follow him.

When Mark had first stepped into his father's shoes, Mr. Hubble—and the Hubble family, in its way, was now a very exalted one, and drove a carriage and pair, with coachman and footman in brand-new livery, and dined late at seven o'clock, with a man-servant to wait at table—Mr. Hubble had taken upon himself to lecture the young man, to give him what he considered a bit of wholesome advice from the pinnacle as it were of his own successful experience. But the master of Marley Mills proper unexpectedly met his match in the stalwart young master of the Lower Mills; and he did not repeat a discomfiting experiment.

Reuben Hubble went back to his grand, large house, which every year he contrived to make grander and newer-looking, feeling decidedly "sat upon," fully comprehending that Mark Hencastle was about the last man in the world who would suffer himself to be patronised by Reuben Hubble, or Reuben anybody else if it came to that.

Mark, at this time, was seven-and-twenty; tall, tanned, strong, and well-set up. If he was not a remarkably handsome man, he was at any rate one of the finest grown young fellows to be found in his native county. He did his duty, and was not ashamed of his trade; he was moderately well-educated, and fond enough of reading when he could make the time for it. He lived temperately and cleanly, and hoped—though he was as yet quite heart-whole—to be sufficiently well off to marry at no very distant day, when his children, should he have any, he resolved, should be brought up as kindly and as carefully as he and Helen themselves had been brought up—that is, to fear God, but no man; to consider home as the first and best place in the universe; and, as good subjects should, to honour their Queen and their country.

Such was Mark Hencastle with his simple creed. His sister Helen, who had all her wits about her, had soon perceived in which direction at the Lower Mills lay the attraction for the Hubble girls, whenever they came over, which was not seldom. Mark was so strong and so manly-looking, it was no wonder, thought Helen, who adored her brother, that they should be fond of rowing themselves across the river in the hope of seeing and having a chat with the master of the Lower Mills. Indeed, they had the reputation in Marley for running after all the good-looking and eligible young men they could get hold of, and even after those who were neither eligible nor good-looking into the bargain.

Amelia Hubble at this time was "getting on." She was about Mark's age, whilst Sophy, the youngest of the three, was by a few months Helen Hencastle's junior. Louisa, the middle one, had married well, and was now abroad with her husband, on account of her delicate health. Their two young children meanwhile—little daughters—were being taken care of by their aunts and their grandparents at Marley Mills.

The wind on that murky November night rushed and howled around the Lower Mills, the place standing upon a less sheltered spot than that upon which was built its wealthier neighbour over the water, and did its best with its clamour to drown the humming and the jarring going on within the building.

The tallow-lights guttered in the draught; the river outside flowed blackly onward, lapping and gurgling in the darkness about the slimy timbers of the bridge. When the wind was lulled for a moment the ever-tumbling splash of the mill-tail plainly made itself heard.

Mark Hencastle, looking out from a little window high up in the wooden walls—and from

which he could have dropped sheer down into the unruffled ebon depths of the silent yet swift-gliding water of the mill-pond—found that the wind blew rain.

"Rain, Master Mark?" inquired the foreman, presently.

"Yes," replied the young man, still leaning out. "I quite expect that we are in for another wet winter, Davy, with floods again—such as we had last year."

"Oh, darn the floods!" said Davy Crockett, always ready for a gossip. "There's no getting about anywhere with the water up to your middle in the lane and the meadows out o' sight altogether. Last year the Redminster Road was like the river itself."

Mark made no rejoinder; perhaps did not hear Davy's wordy observation. Once set talking, Davy was apt to wax tedious.

The young master was whistling softly to himself and listening to something out in the night at the same time. He fancied that he had caught the sound of wheels coming along the Redminster Road.

He stopped whistling and listened intently. Surely those wheels now were rattling down the lane which led direct to the Lower Mills?

"Who can it be at this time of night," Hernecastle wondered, "if they are coming here?"

His watch was indoors; he had forgotten to wind it up.

"Davy, what's the time?" he called out over his shoulder.

The foreman clutched his white breeches with one hand, and with the other dived into some out-of-the-way corner of them, dragging out therefrom, by a black ribbon, a silver watch of the modest size of a cricket ball.

"It's eight upon half-past nine, Master Mark," said he.

"Thanks," said Mark.

The wheels along the lane were certainly coming nearer. Mark decided that it must be the doctor's gig; for Mrs. Wickie, the wife of one of his men, who, on account of her ever-increasing family, occupied the largest cottage in the mill-yard, was daily expecting to be ill. Yes, doubtless Mrs. Wickie had sent off in a hurry to Marley for Mr. Stone.

"Is Mrs. Wickie ill yet, Davy, do you know?" inquired Mark, quite simply. "I thought I heard the doctor's gig coming down the lane."

"No-o," replied Davy, dubiously; "I don't think she is, sir. She was all right, I know, at tea-time, for I see her standing at the door a-talking with Jasper Brooke."

"Ah," said Mark, absently.

"And Jasper tells me, Master Mark," continued Davy, "that Sir Philip is expected at Mossout Priory for Christmas. They say he's short of money-agen, and is going to lie quiet here for a bit. Lor, sir, there can't be nothing to do at Mossout now-a-days; and that young gent there—Mr. Arming—must have an easy time of it!"

"Shouldn't wonder," said Mark.

"The place is like a howlin' wilderness, as the sayin' is," said Davy Crockett. "I crossed the park only t'other day. It's a thousand pities, sir, that 'tis a free old property like that all a-going to the dooce—"

"If it hasn't gone already," muttered Hernecastle.

"Jest for the want of the money handy to keep it up like," said Davy. "They do say as Sir Philip owes a mint o' coin to the big man across the water," nodding with a leer in the direction of Marley Mills.

"Who told you that?" asked Mark, carelessly.

"I heard Jasper Brooke say so, sir."

"Ah, it won't do to listen to all that Jasper may talk about, you see, Davy. He doesn't always know what he's saying, I fancy—he gets lost occasionally, and can't remember things properly. His troubles, my father used to say, made an old man of him before his time," answered Mark; "and my father was about right, I'm sure."

"Ay, he's breaking fast, is poor old Jasper—he can't bide at the Lock much longer, Master Mark, I should say; he's got too slow, and people haven't patience with his doddery ways," said

Davy, with the air of a man who has still the best of his own years ahead of him. "Lor! how well do I remember that gal of his with the carous fine name; and what a beauty she was, too, years ago, when she lived with the old man at the Lock! It was seventeen years ago last summer that she died—bless me, how the time slips away! Yes; just seventeen years ago it is since old Jasper went up to London town to see the last of her, poor soul. Ah! she was a bonny one to look at, Master Mark, she was, and no mistake!"

"So I've heard," said Mark. "I can't say that I recollect her; though I haven't forgotten Jasper Brooke's going to London."

"O' course not, sir." But as to what I was saying, sir, about Sir Philip Wroughton, and Mr. Hubble—why, I heard a good deal o' talk about it," said the foreman, mysteriously, "only t'other day in Marley."

"We all know what a hot-bed of lies and scandal Marley is, Davy," laughed Hernecastle.

As he spoke, a fresh blast of mingled wind and rain swept over the meadows and the turbulent river and shook the Lower Mills to their very base.

For some moments nothing then, in that upper store-room, could be heard save the roar of the wind. Mark drew in his head and broad shoulders, closed the dusty little casement, and snuffed the tallow lights.

"Right you are there, sir," called out Davy heartily, from the bottom of a bin as large as a small room, in which he was now engaged in folding sacks. "Why, o' Saturday nights, at the 'Hopleaf,' you can hear anything you've a mind to, jest for the trouble o' keeping your ears open, sir—"

"Truth, or the other thing, I suppose?" said the master drily.

"That is as may be, o' course, Master Mark," replied the man—"jest as it happens. Why, sir, when Miss Pinner goes into Marley, Martha says, she scrapes together every tit-bit and morsel o' tattle she can to take back with her to the Miss Hubbles. They likes it. They don't care how long she's gone, provided she brings 'em home plenty o' talk—the spicier the better, Martha says—and it ain't hard to do, for the place is always full of it."

"I dare say," laughed Hernecastle, yawning.

"I went over this morning," continued the garrulous Davy, "with a message from Miss Helen to Miss Melia, and I see that there Miss Pinner at the kitchen door. She says, sir, as they've got a governess, or summat o' the sort, coming there to look after the little gals, because Miss Melia and Miss Sophy have had about enough of them, and wants to shunt 'em on to somebody else—"

"Ah, yes," Mark interrupted, with another yawn, "I did hear something of the kind some time ago, I believe."

He and Helen had seen little of the Hubble girls lately, owing to the wet and blustery weather.

"Mind and send in for your beer, Davy; it's getting late."

"Thanky, Master Mark. Good-night," returned Davy.

Unmistakably now there was a sound of wheels; wheels that were crushing the damp stones outside. A voice called up from a flower ladder:

"Is the master aloft there? If so, he's wanted."

"All right," Hernecastle shouted down through the opening in the floor. "Coming!"

With the ease and dexterity which spring from long habit he disappeared rapidly down the steep ladders that led to the roomier caverns at the basement of the mill.

"What the dickens can they want, whoever they are, at this hour?" muttered the young man. "It can't be Mrs. Wickie, then, after all!"

So saying, and taking a lantern from one of his men whom he met ascending to the store-room he had just left, the master went out alone into the mill-yard.

How little on that night guessed Mark Her-

castle that the story of his life was about to begin!

CHAPTER V.

LINA FERRIS.

"That is not you, Mr. Stone, is it?" called out Mark, in order to be sure upon this point.

The night being so wild, the dim lamps on either side of the vehicle gave him but scanty aid to distinguish the pattern of its make. Neither could he discern the form of its driver.

So, holding the lantern above his head, Hernecastle went towards the trap, which had halted a few yards from the mill door, and he then perceived that it was one of the ramshackle old flies and broken-kneed quadrupeds from "The Bear Hotel," in Marley.

"She tol' me to bring her to the Lower Mills, an' I ha' brought her, ain't I, to the Lower Mills?" said a thick voice from the box-seat—a voice which Mark instantly recognised; "an' Mr. Mark Hernecastle he live at the Lower Mills, don't he? Allus thought so, 'm sure."

"Oh, it's you, is it, Nicky Burdon—drunk as usual?" cried Hernecastle, sharply. "What fresh mischief have you been up to to-night?"

"She shaid the Lower Mills—take an' oath she shaid the Lower Mills," the dispirited Nicky, who was a well-known character at "The Bear" in Marley, was beginning again; "an' I ha' brought her to—"

Whereupon a lady put her head out of the fly window, and said, in a clear, sweet-toned voice, which nevertheless at that moment had in it the ring of just indignation:

"There is evidently some mistake, and the wretched man is intoxicated. Hernecastle certainly was not the name I told him: it was Hubble—and the people I mean live at Marley Mills. Where am I? To what place has he brought me?" she added, with evident anxiety. "Ah, it must be—I remember—"

She checked herself abruptly.

Mark had presented himself bare-headed at the window of the fly, and hastened to explain to the strange lady, who, he could just make out, was young and warmly clothed and hooded, that there was indeed a grave mistake, owing to the tipsy stupidity of the miserable Nicky; but that the blunder could be rectified in a very short time, the Hubbles' house being situated only just across the river.

"I can reach it, then, I suppose, by means of the bridge, cannot I?" asked the stranger quickly.

And Mark replied,—

"Yes; over the bridge and round by the Lock-garden, which adjoins the Hubbles' shrubberies. There is no other way at this time of year. If it were summer-time you might cross by water."

By the flickering light of the lantern he was regarding the pale, hooded face within the carriage with so much interest and curiosity that he failed to notice a singular circumstance: that the girl—she looked about one or two-and-twenty—had mentioned their picturesque old wooden bridge quite of her own accord; there had been no suggestion about a bridge from Mark himself. This, surely, in an absolute stranger to the neighbourhood, was odd, to say the least of it.

However, the fact was lost on Hernecastle; and perhaps she was no stranger after all. Speaking, he had opened the fly door; then held out his hand to assist the lady to alight.

"You must allow me to act as your guide," said he; "and I will see that your luggage follows us directly."

The slight, hooded figure stepped forth into the darkness, purse in hand to pay her fare. She murmured as her arm just touched Hernecastle's:

"It is very good of you."

"Pray do not say so," replied the young man eagerly, with a vague wonder, perhaps, at his own gallantry. Mark Hernecastle was by no means what is termed a "ladies' man." In the society of women with whom he was intimately acquainted—the Hubble girls, for instance—he was natural and easy enough. In the company of

strangers of the gentler sex the strong young fellow was inclined to wax shy.

On that tempestuous November night, however, when Nicky Burden drove his feeble old fly into the yard of the Lower Mills instead of up to the smart stuccoed entrance gates of Marley Mills proper, Mark somehow forgot to be awkward in his desire to be of service to his unexpected visitor.

"But stay a moment," he continued. "Do let me beg you to come into our house; it is close by. My sister Helen, who lives with me, is indoors, and will be only too pleased to get you any refreshment you might like. A cup of tea, you know, or anything. I can answer for her. You are both cold and tired perhaps, and—"

"Thank you very much," she interrupted quietly, "but I cannot do as you suggest. I must hasten," with a glance across the moaning river to where the lighted windows of Marley Mills shone out upon the windy gloom, "at once to my destination."

So Hernecastle called out lustily:

"Nicky, just rouse yourself! Look sharp and haul down those trunks, will you?"

Nicky, with a horsecloth tucked about his legs, had fallen asleep upon the box. He started violently and almost rolled off.

"Comin', sir, comin'!" he shouted, imagining for a second or two that he was in the stable-yard at "The Bear," and that somebody in the hotel wanted him.

Mark meanwhile gave instructions to one of his men with regard to the bringing over of the luggage, telling him first of all to run to the house and explain to Miss Helen what had happened, and whither he, her brother, was gone. And then he said—"As for you, Nicky, be off with you now, immediately. Do you hear?"

The incorrigible Nicky mumbled something in reply—an inarticulate speech in which the words "beer," "Mr. Hernecastle's health," and "a natty night," were yet audibly enough insinuated. But it met with no friendly response from Mark.

"Not a drop more of anything do you get here," said he, "you have had more than's good for you already at the 'Packhorse.'"

"Aint' been at 'The Pack'oss"—been at 'The Hopleaf' for a change," hiccuped Nicky, sullenly.

"No matter," was Mark's stern rejoinder; "be off with you at once, you rascal! The next time I see you in Marley I hope you'll be sober—if not for your own sake, at least for your poor old grandmother's. Good-night."

Nicky Burden made use of some very bad, but happily unintelligible language, seized his whip to lash viciously at his poor lean beast, and finally rattled out of the mill-yard, swearing horribly all the way on his homeward journey to Marley.

Not without shyness now, Hernecastle offered his arm to the quiet figure at his side. She took it without demur; accepted it, indeed, with the self-possession which was evidently natural to her. Also, without hesitation, she handed over to Mark's care her travelling bag and umbrella. It was folly to think of putting up the latter; the wind would have turned it inside out, made it its own, and driven it like a leaf through the wild air.

"You are not afraid of the river on such a night?" said Hernecastle.

"Not in the least," she replied.

As they made their difficult way along the rough planks of the bridge—which jarred and trembled beneath their steps, and through which, by the lantern's yellow light, they could see the troubled water, with its masses of eddying foam, heaving and rolling about the slimy wooden posts—Mark inquired of his companion how it had happened that the Hubbles had not sent their carriage to meet her? She had come on a visit to Marley Mills, the young man vaguely supposed.

In reply she explained to him that she had missed the train at Highcross—between which place and Marley-on-the-Wane a branch of the main line had of late years been opened—and in consequence had been compelled to wait for nearly a couple of hours at that dreary little wayside station. When the last train of all ran down to Marley, she found nobody there to meet her.

As it had been arranged that she should arrive at Marley at seven o'clock, and had failed to appear, the Hubbles, the girl imagined, had concluded that she would not come until the following day. "Too bad of them!" commented Hernecastle, frowning. "They might have met the last train."

"And so have saved me from the tender mercies of your friend—Nicky Burden? That is his queer name, is it not?" she said demurely.

The tender mercies of Nicky Burden! The horror of the future was so near, so close upon her that its shadow touched her already—and she knew it not!

"Do—do you know," said the young man, with some embarrassment, "that I am more than half inclined to forgive Mr. Nicky his blunder of to-night?" If he had been sober—which he seldom is—and had driven you by way of the Marley road instead of coming our Redminster way, I should then have been deprived, you know, of—of—the pleasure of—"

Not by any means was the paying of compliments Mark Hernecastle's strong point. He floundered hopelessly, stopped, and blushed to the very roots of his hair. Fortunately there was neither moon nor star; the only light near them was that about their feet, which was shed from the lantern he carried.

After a few seconds of silence, the strange girl said in her peculiarly sweet and clear-toned voice—and Hernecastle was wondering now whether it was pride or scorn, or both, which he could detect in its refined inflections—

"I should tell you at once that I am only the governess they are expecting. Had I been a friend, they would have waited for me in all probability—I do not know; I do not think I care. The ways of these people are wholly unknown to me."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mark, indignantly, "that is like them." Then more quietly: "Yes, we did hear—my sister and I—that a lady was coming to Marley Mills as governess to the children; Mr. Hubble's grandchildren; we were speaking of it, in fact, only the other day. We had no idea, though, that the lady was expected so soon," said Hernecastle simply. "Miss—Miss—I do not know your name, you see," he stammered.

Another pause, then—

"I am Miss Ferris. My name is Lina Ferris," she said, with unmistakable pride.

"Miss Ferris," continued Mark, lingering on the name as if it were very pleasant to utter; "Miss Ferris, you will not, I am afraid, thank me for enlightening you, but—but I should not be surprised if you were disappointed in the Hubble family."

"No?" she said, calmly.

"Of course you may discover that they improve upon acquaintance," said Mark, dubiously.

"I assure you that it does not signify in the least degree to me, Mr. Hernecastle, what these people may be like in themselves. They are nothing to me. They can in no wise interfere with the work that I have to do."

It was a curious answer; but at the time it did not strike Mark as being so; perhaps he thought dimly that she alluded to her work of tuition. Afterwards, however, he remembered her words and pondered them.

They were approaching the Lock.

Mark became suddenly aware that the small hand resting upon his coat-sleeve had grown nervous—in fact, was trembling perceptibly.

Miss Ferris's calmness and courage seemed to be forsaking her.

A solitary light shone in an upper casement of the cottage—the window of Jasper Brooke's room, wherein, it might be, the weary and aged lock-keeper was tossing sleepless on his bed or dreaming of his dead daughter whom he had lost years ago.

"You find the wind from the river rather chilly, I fear; it comes sweeping up just here over the Moss court meadows yonder," suggested Mark, seized then and there with a wild desire to pull off his coat, in order to make an additional wrap for the Hubbles' governess.

"No, no; I hardly feel it! Is this—is this

the Lock?—the Lock cottage?" asked Miss Ferris, abruptly.

Hernecastle said that it was; remarking carelessly, with an upward glance at the lighted lattice—

"The poor old fellow has already gone to bed, I suppose. Let us hope, for his sake, that no barge or anything will be coming through to-night."

"I beg your pardon," she said. "I was not listening. You are speaking of—"

"Of Jasper Brooke, the lock-keeper," Mark replied.

"You mean that he would have to get up and let it through the lock, if a boat were to come along down the river?" Miss Ferris said, shuddering as she put the question.

"Yes; he would have to come down, certainly, and open the gates," answered Mark, cheerily. "No wonder you shiver at the idea, Miss Ferris; it is not a pleasant one, especially on a winter night. Jasper now-a-days is not young and tough enough for the work; he's past it, really; but he won't be persuaded to give it up; the place, you see, has been his home for so many years."

"Poor, poor old man!" said the girl, slowly and tremulously.

"You have a gentle heart," ventured Hernecastle, shyly, "so to pity the misfortunes of a stranger."

"A gentle heart! I do not know—perhaps. It can be as hard as granite, notwithstanding," she said.

In the shadow of her hood her eyes flashed; her teeth were set. Beneath her bodice her bosom throbbed to aching.

"Granite! I won't believe it," returned Mark stoutly, unconscious of her pain and emotion.

She made no rejoinder now; but, halting, said hurriedly:

"And yonder, you say, Mr. Hernecastle, is Moss court Priory?"

Mark had said nothing of the kind. He had mentioned the Moss court meadows, but not a word of the Priory itself. Oblivious, however, of this fact, he made answer—mechanically hoisting his lantern as if the poor light it gave could fling its beams athwart the darkling meadows and show up the ancient ruin amidst its low-lying pastures, where dwelt, when he visited the neighbourhood, Sir Philip Wroughton, with grim care in his breast and wan ghosts about his hearth—

"Yes; yonder is Moss court Priory. You must go there one day with my sister, and explore the old place—"

"I hope to do so," said the girl, hurrying onward.

"A great friend of ours—of Helen's and mine—lives there at Moss court," Hernecastle was continuing. "We could go over the old house any day you pleased, Miss Ferris. By-the-bye, I hope you will like my sister Helen, and that you and she will become friends in time. If you are not happy and comfortable with the Hubbles, you must make our house your—"

Mark was talking to space.

His lantern dropped with a jerk when he found himself alone. The sudden movement of his arm, either that or a gust of wind, extinguished the bit of candle within the horn cage.

Cursing the mishap, he ran forward, sick with apprehension.

"Miss Ferris—Miss Ferris!" he shouted. "For Heaven's sake take care what you're about! Don't move another step until I am with you! You don't know the ground—"

He was too late.

The shrill cry of a woman's voice rang out upon the blustering night. The wind, as it swept by the river, caught up the shriek and carried it afar over the woods and meadows.

"Help—help me—I am sinking!"

The strange governess, having quitted Mark's side, had walked sheer into the black, cold abyss of the lock!

(To be continued.)

RURAL postmen in Norway are to be mounted on bicycles.

FICKLE FORTUNE.

—:0:—

CHAPTER XXXII.—(continued.)

THE great lady never smiled again and soon after the doors of the convent closed upon one of the most beautiful women of her time.

On her death-bed she called one and all of those about her to listen to her tragic story.

She cried out that they must not touch her hand, for it was stained with human blood; and it was then that her horrible story was brought to light.

And in an awful whisper, while the long shadows deepened, she made this terrible revelation: that years before she had murdered her maid, Gretchen, because the girl was loved by him whom she would have won.

In the long hours of the day, and in the dark watches of the night, her one thought had been how she could take him from Gretchen; and she told herself the only way was to rid herself of the girl; ay, to put her where she could never again come between her and the man she loved.

By night and by day she pondered upon how it should be done, then suddenly the way and means occurred to her.

There was a powerful drug of which she had heard that gave to women the most marvellous of complexions, but which sooner or later caused death.

Gretchen should take it; it could be placed in the basin of water in which she was wont to bathe her face each morning, and it would enter the body through the pores of the skin. In this way the doctors would be completely baffled, for they would not be able to trace the poison.

She put this dastardly plot into execution, and her cruel heart did not upbraid her, though she saw the girl droop and fade daily before her eyes.

When she looked out of her window and saw Gretchen and her lover pacing up and down the primrose path in the moonlight, a horrible laugh would break from the great lady's ripe, red lips.

"There will be but a few more of these meetings, tender partings and kisses under the larch-tree boughs."

She had never dreamed, this false, cruel beauty, that a man's heart could be constant to a dead love and spurn a living one.

All these years she had lived to rue it; but neither prayers, nor suffering, nor pangs of conscience could atone for the terrible crime committed.

During all the years that had passed since Gretchen had been lying in that lonely grave, she had never known one moment's peace of mind, until this hour when she lay dying and had confessed all.

Slowly, twice, thrice, Annie Best read the story through, and as she read, a terrible thought came into her own mind.

Why could not she procure this same drug, and administer it in the same way to Agnes Burton.

Mad with the pangs of jealousy, she seized eagerly upon any scheme that promised to rid her of the girl she had learned to hate.

Why not try it? No detection could follow; no one would ever know. And besides, too, she had an old grudge against the girl. Agnes Burton had been the cause of her leaving the bindery.

They had had a bitter quarrel about Mercy. True, Agnes had felt sorry over the affair almost the next moment, and had written to tell Annie so. But Annie had never forgiven her. She would put her out of her lover's path and wipe out that old grudge at one and the same time.

She took the paper up to her room and hid it very carefully in her satchel.

True, Agnes had taken her in this time without saying one word of the past unpleasantness, treating her as though that quarrel had never been.

But Annie was different. She was one of the

kind that "never forgets, never forgives" while life lasts.

When the household was wrapped in deep sleep that night, Annie stole out upon her terrible mission.

Several careful druggists refused to fill her order; but this did not daunt her. She knew that among the lot she would soon come across a catch-penny, and in this supposition she was quite right.

She soon found a place, and secured the deadly drug which she called for, and she stole into the house again without anyone being the wiser for her midnight trip.

The light was turned low in the sick-room as she entered it, and Mrs. Smith sat half dozing in her chair by the bedside.

She started up as Annie crossed the threshold.

"You needn't mind staying any longer," she remarked, brusquely; "I will take charge of the patient now."

"No," said the other, quietly, but firmly. "It is between twelve and one that the most important medicine must be administered."

"Don't you suppose I am capable of giving it?" retorted Annie, angrily enough. "You don't seem to realize what is the business of a paid nurse!"

The other made no remark, but still she lingered. Had she a suspicion that there was anything amiss? Annie wondered, with a guilty flush suffusing her face.

She was a strange creature, anyhow, with that old-looking face, the great mass of thick black hair studded with grey, and the thick blue glasses.

Where had she seen some one of whom this creature reminded her so strangely and so strongly?

Even the tone of her voice, although it sounded hoarse and unnatural, was somehow familiar to her.

The very way in which Mrs. Smith crested her head she had seen somewhere before, and it had made quite an impression upon her at the time.

There was something so mysterious about her that it puzzled Annie and aroused her suspicions more and more.

"I cannot help thinking that she is always spying upon every movement of mine, and she listens—I am sure she does—to every word the doctor and I say; and these people who watch others so much always need watching themselves."

Seeing that Annie Best was determined to banish her from the sick-room, Mercy quitted the apartment with a very heavy heart, though she could not have told why.

She was sorry that Annie Best was under that roof—especially as nurse to poor Agnes, for she knew full well that Annie had no love in her heart for the girl whose very life depended on her nursing.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE days that followed were dark ones to the Worth household, for Agnes began to fail rapidly. The pallid cheeks grew more transparent day by day, the dark, sombre eyes more hollow, and the slender form more emaciated.

She grew so weak that the entire household began to grow terribly alarmed over her condition. Even the doctor had grave apprehension for his patient.

"The case of Miss Burton puzzles me completely," he said to Doctor Gibson, when he returned to his office one afternoon. "I have never known of symptoms like hers;" and he minutely described the strange turn the case had taken which had baffled him completely.

"As soon as I am able to be about I will go with you and see for myself just where the trouble is."

Meanwhile a serious matter was agitating the brain of poor Agnes Burton.

She realised before any of the rest did that her condition was becoming alarming, and her wedding-day was drawing nearer and nearer.

But when that day dawned, a secret voice in her heart whispered that she would be "the bride of death," and not Fred Worth's.

She wondered if Heaven meant it for the best, that she must give up the life that might have held so much for her. She had longed for death many a time; but now that it seemed imminent, her very soul grew frightened because of one thought: she would have to leave Fred behind her. It seemed to her that though she should be buried fathoms deep, her soul would cling to earth—and Fred. What if, in time to come, he should forget her! Ah! that was the bitterest stroke of all; and she realised that, no matter how deeply a person may love, when the object of that affection dies time brings balm to his woe, and mellow it into forgetfulness or to a shadowy memory.

If she were to die, would he ever love another, and stand with that other before the altar?

In her day-dreams, in times gone by, Agnes had pictured to herself—as girls will in those rosy moments—how she would stand at the altar, and listen with whirling brain and beating heart to those sweet solemn words that would bind her for ever to the man she loved with more than a passing love. She pictured how she would walk down the aisle, leaning on his arm—that great, strong arm that would be her support for evermore—a great mist of happy tears in her eyes as she clung to him.

She even pictured to herself how he would help her into the coach, and how they would drive away out into the great wide world together, to be separated never again.

Instead of all this, now she would be lying in her grave, with blue forget-me-nots and pale primroses on her breast.

Fred would be going through that scene with another as his bride; and as the years rolled by he would forget her, or think of her only now and then at times—not with keen regret, but with faint, vague indifference.

Oh, Heaven! if it had been he who was destined to die, she would have shut herself up from the world, and would have lived only for his memory.

Her soul would never have ceased to cry out for him.

She could never have forgotten the clasp of his hand, the tone of his voice, or the ring of his footstep while life lasted.

Her last prayer would have been, when death's dew gathered on her brow, to be buried beside him.

But men are more fickle than women. How few of them remain true to a dead love!

As she tossed to and fro on her pillow, these thoughts tortured her more than tongue could tell.

Then a strange fancy took possession of her.

The more she thought of it, the more her heart longed to accomplish it, until she could not restrain the longing that seemed to take entire possession of her.

And one day, when she seemed even more ill than usual, she could no longer restrain the impulse to send for Fred!

He came quickly at her bidding, sat down by her couch, caught the little white hand—ah! terribly thin and white now—in his, and raised it to his lips.

"Did you wish me to sit with you, Agnes?" he said. "Or would you like me to read to you?"

"No; I want to talk to you, Fred," she said, with a little quiver in her voice.

"You must not talk, dear," he answered. "Let me do all the talking. You shall listen, that will be best."

"I can say all that I have to tell you in a very few words," she gasped, her other hand creeping to his bowed head and softly resting there.

"I want to tell you of something that may make you smile, Fred," she began. "But—but you must not find fault with me, even when I tell you it has cost me many a tear, or—or think me weak and foolish. Do you promise me?"

"Yes," he said, trying to speak lightly.

"Have you ever thought how near it is to— to our wedding day, Fred?" she whispered, faintly.

"Yes," said Fred, with never a thought of what was coming.

"What—what would you do if I were still ill when it dawned?"

"The ceremony could be performed just the same," he answered, promptly. "There would be no wedding at the church, no invited guests; that would be all the difference."

"Would you wish to marry me if—if you knew that I would never be well again, and that perhaps death would be hovering very, very near to claim me, and to part me from you?"

"I will keep to my part of the compact," Agnes, he said, huskily.

"But what if I should die before it, Fred," she questioned, faintly.

He looked up at her in puzzled wonder.

"I do not know what you mean, Agnes," he said, gravely—"what you are trying to get at."

Then it all came out with a burst of sobs.

"Oh, Fred! I mean this: I—I want to belong to you in life and in death. I do not want you to have any other lover but me, even if I should be taken from you. I want you to be true to me forever. I could not rest in my grave, though they buried me fathoms deep, if you ever called another—wife! If I am to die, Fred, you must promise me one thing—that you will never wed—another!"

He started back with a look of distress on his fair, handsome, haggard face.

"How can you talk of such a thing, my dear Agnes," he said, reproachfully. "You pain me beyond measure."

"You will give me that promise, will you not, Fred?" she pleaded. "The pangs of death will be easier to bear if my mind is but at rest on that subject."

"You are going to get well soon, and the ceremony will take place as we have arranged," he said, soothingly; but she shook her head.

"If I should not, Fred," she whispered, fixing her burning eyes wistfully on his face, "let me have the assurance from your lips that you will never, never put another in my place."

"If it will settle any doubts in your mind, I give you the promise that you ask," he answered, in a low, grave voice; and it was worth that promise to see the girl's pale face light up with a swift flush of joy.

"Oh, thank you—thank you, Fred!" she sobbed. "My heart is jubilant again, for now I feel that in life and in death we are bound to each other. If I were to die first, and it should be long years after that you were called, you would find me waiting for you beside the golden gate. Oh, how patiently I would wait there! I could not dwell in peace, even in Heaven, if I knew that the soul of another woman would be waiting at the gate for you. I feel, oh, so much better for the promise you have given me!"

At that moment a strange incident was taking place in Mercy's room.

Almost thoroughly exhausted with night-watching, Mercy had fallen asleep in a chair, in which she had sat down for a few moment's rest.

Was it only a vision? she wondered, or did she hear some one call her name softly: "Mercy! Mercy!"

She turned her head quickly, but she could see no one, although some one was whispering:

"Why do you nurse Agnes so carefully? If it is destined that she should die, I wonder that you grieve when you know that her death will bring freedom to Fred Worth and love to you!"

The idea was so startling that for a time it nearly took her breath away.

She had never thought of it in that light before.

"Let her drift quietly on to the end which is near. If you do not work too zealously to save her, your reward will be the heart of him whom you love at last. Take warning, and heed my words!"

Mercy sprang from her chair, quivering with excitement.

That action aroused her, and brought her to a realization of where she was.

She had been fast asleep, and the words that still rang in her ears shocked her yet, even though she knew it was but a dream—though

such a vivid one—and the voice that whispered those words to her seemed so like Fred's.

Still the idea was in her head. If Agnes Burton died, her lover would be free again, and she knew what that would mean for herself.

She tried to put the thought from her, but she could not; it haunted her continually.

She tried to tell herself that even if Agnes were to die she would never make herself known to Fred.

But, even after she had said all that, she knew in her own mind that she would be sure to let Fred know at last, for she would never realize a moment's happiness until she was once more what she had been to Fred in the past.

It had been such a slight affair that had parted them, and that had drifted two hearts asunder.

"Alas! how light a cause may move
Discussions between hearts that love—
Hearts that the world in vain had tried,
And sorrow but more closely tied;
That stood the storm when waves were rough,
Yet in a sunny hour fell off,
Like ships that have gone down at sea
When heaven was all tranquillity."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

DURING the week that followed, the words that Mercy had heard in her dream constantly recurred to her.

She watched Agnes fade from hour to hour, with a strange sensation in her heart.

At first she fought against the feeling that seemed to be forced upon her.

She cried out to herself that Agnes must live; but with that thought always came the one that, if she recovered, it would mean the downfall of all her own future happiness.

At last her growing love for Fred Worth conquered her. She yielded to it. It was like the intoxication of rare wine, of sweet, subtle perfume, until at last, in secret, she confessed to herself that she loved him.

"I might have been happy," she thought, "if Fred's heart and mine had never drifted apart."

Slowly, by degrees, her sense of right and wrong was becoming warped. Mercy had come to that pass where there is no more hope of peace and calmness. She thought of nothing but that she loved Fred with all the strength and fervour of her despairing soul, and the only barrier between them was—Agnes.

She yielded heart and soul to this one thought.

To make matters all the worse, the sick girl made a confidante of her, and would talk to her for long hours at a time over her approaching marriage—that is, if she should recover.

Every word she said was like the sharp thrust of a sword to Mercy, but day by day Mercy could not help but notice the terrible change that was taking place in Agnes Burton.

Every afternoon her couch was drawn to the bay-window. She liked to be propped up where she could look out into the sun-lit garden, with its green foliage and bright-hued flowers; for it was in the garden that Fred could be seen, pacing up and down under the trees, smoking his afternoon cigar.

The sunshine that fell on Agnes's colourless face showed how great was the change in it from day to day—so white, so wan, that Mercy shrank back, startled, frightened, if she came suddenly into the room.

She would always call for Fred when she saw him, and when he came into the room she would hold out her arms to him with a strange, low cry.

He would always kneel down by her side, talk to her, try to cheer her. Sleep would never come to her unless he sat by her side, holding her hands in his.

It was with great relief that Mr. Worth heard at length that Doctor Gibson was so much better that he would visit Agnes the next afternoon.

When he came Doctor Treseott took him at once to the sick room, and there they held a long and secret consultation.

"I am obliged to say, sir, that I shall have to abandon the case," said Treseott. "I am com-

pletely dumbfounded with it. I have most carefully followed out your every suggestion, and yet the patient fails rapidly before my eyes day after day."

Doctor Gibson looked thoughtful.

When he left Agnes's couch he found Mr. Worth awaiting him in the library.

"What do you think of her, sir?" he asked, quickly.

The doctor smiled at his eagerness.

"There is not much the matter," he replied; "a good tonic, rest, and a little cheerful society will soon set the young lady right again."

"It is the first time that you have seen her, doctor," said Fred, rather dubiously. "You never saw her in health, sir. You do not know how alarmingly she has changed for the worse. She had a brilliant colour, but it has all gone."

"It will soon return," said the doctor, encouragingly; and with a few further words he left Fred more mystified than ever.

Left to himself, the old doctor's face looked strangely grave. As young Treseott had said, there were symptoms about the case which puzzled him exceedingly.

For forty odd years he had enjoyed a large practice, but in all that time he had never had a case exactly like this.

He made up his mind then and there that there was something about this case which was beyond him—there was something about it that he could not fathom, that was shrouded in mystery.

He wired, without delay, an urgent message to an eminent physician with whom he was on excellent terms. It was almost midnight when Doctor Harris arrived at the Worth mansion.

His friend Doctor Gibson was awaiting him, and together they made their way at once to the sick-room.

"This is an urgent case, I suppose?" said Doctor Harris.

"I am afraid so," was the reply. "You will be able to judge when you see the patient."

Doctor Harris's stern face grew sterner still as he made his examination of poor Agnes. Then the doctors quitted the room and commenced their consultation.

Annie Best looked after them with a strange smile on her face, her black eyes glittering.

"No matter how skillful they may be, they will never discover the true cause of Agnes Burton's illness," she said to herself with a little, low, discordant laugh.

The two doctors had passed out into the corridor, and were pacing slowly up and down together.

"Well," said Doctor Gibson, "I wonder if we both have the same opinion in regard to this case?"

"It can admit of but one," returned Doctor Harris, with a shake of his head.

"And that is?"

"It is a case of slow poisoning," was the answer.

Doctor Gibson grasped his friend's hand.

"That was my view exactly," he said, huskily.

"There is but one way to proceed," returned Doctor Harris. "We must set a watch upon the inmates of the sick-room, and discover who is the perpetrator of this awful crime; and in the meantime make minute inquiries if there is anyone under this roof who would be likely to be benefited by this poor girl's death. I propose that we proceed without an hour's delay."

"Agreed!" returned the other, promptly.

"And I would suggest, as well, that a woman be secured, if possible, to undertake this task of ferreting out who is responsible for this awful crime that will soon terminate fatally if not nipped in the bud."

The next morning a young coloured girl duly presented herself at the Worth mansion.

"I have brought you an assistant," said Doctor Gibson, leading her into the presence of Mercy and Annie Best, and bowing to each in turn.

"She is to obey your orders implicitly, and wait upon you. The medicines we have left me of an extremely pungent odour, and likely to overcome a person unused to them. She can attend to mixing the preparations for you, if you both consider her competent to do so, which you can tell after a short trial;" adding, besides: "One drop

of this stains the hands, and it cannot be got off for months. I thought this might be sufficient reason for placing this young girl at your disposal."

"You are very thoughtful sir," said Annie Best, sweetly; but Mercy spoke never a word.

Both doctors turned and looked keenly at her; then the conversation drifted quickly into another channel; but both had made up their minds that this boded no good for the slender, dark-looking woman with the blue glasses who hovered continually about the sick girl's couch.

They determined to watch and await results. As the doctors were leaving, under guise of giving a few words of instruction to Myra, the mulatto girl, they whispered hurriedly in her ear.

"I understand," she answered, with a nod of her head. "Nothing shall escape my eye."

The next day Doctor Gibson made minute inquiries regarding every member of the household, and every addition that had been made to it for the past few months; and he learned, casually, that the only person under that roof with whose history the Worths were not thoroughly acquainted was—Mrs. Smith.

Furthermore, he discovered that she had secured the place without proper recommendations. This he considered a serious matter. He was quite willing to give her the benefit of a doubt; still, it was too grave a matter of which he had charge. Every moment of time wasted in discovering the perpetrator of the awful crime was dangerous to Miss Burton, his beautiful patient exposed to such deadly peril.

All unimpaired of the espionage placed upon her, Mercy went about her duties in the same faithful manner.

In the morning she read to and amused old Mrs. Worth. In the afternoon she attended to all the duties of the household; for in the midst of their difficulties their housekeeper had left them.

In the evening she relieved Annie Best from her arduous duties in the sick-room.

The only gleam of brightness that fell athwart her path was meeting Fred Worth at the table three times a day. Her life merged into one great longing to be near him.

She tried to picture how it would be when Agnes recovered and he should marry her. Of course, they would still dwell beneath that roof. Could the same home that held them hold her?

She could not endure seeing them so happy in each other's love. Whenever Fred entered the sick-room, Mercy always made some pretence to leave it.

The sight of him, bringing a flower to Agnes would be enough to almost break her heart with poignant grief.

She could not help but notice how handsome he was growing day by day.

Oh, what would she not have given for just one of the kindly words he used to speak to her, a tender look, a caress!

Oh, how mad she had been not to realise his great worth in those other days! She wondered if he ever thought of those moments now. Since Agnes had confessed to her in secret that Fred still loved her better than anything in this world her heart had been full of contending emotions.

How she had struggled against this new-born love that was springing into new life again in her soul; but, try as hard as she would, she found that it was impossible to bar out love for Fred, though she thought of the words,—

"Am I mad that I should cherish
That which bears such bitter fruit?
I will pluck it from my bosom,
Though my heart be at the root."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Not one thought did Mercy give to Leonard Trescott during these days. It is strange what a power some young girls possess in throwing off all tender thoughts from their hearts when the object of them has proven himself unworthy.

All love for Leonard Trescott had gone out of her heart when she saw him choose Vena's society instead of her own, and she at the time his betrothed bride!

Mercy's only hope was that Trescott would not penetrate her disguise, and never know what had become of her.

She did not know but what he was now betrothed to Vena, and she did not care. She was glad to be rid of him, at any cost. She only wished that Annie Best—who was still so intensely in love with her false lover—knew how treacherous he was. She wished she dare tell her about Vena.

In her hours of loneliness little Pearl was a great comfort to Mercy. She almost lost sight of her troubles at times in taking care of the child, who was quite as desolate in the world as herself.

She never forgot one morning that broke sunny enough for her, but ended in desolation more bitter to endure than death.

Mrs. Worth and herself were seated at the breakfast-table, when Fred entered and took his seat opposite Mercy. He bent his fair, handsome head, and kissed his mother as he passed her, and bowed courteously to "Mrs. Smith."

Both noticed that his fair, handsome face was very pale, and his right hand looked bruised. Mrs. Worth spoke of it at once.

"What is the matter—what has happened, Fred, my boy?" she asked, earnestly. "What does your agitation mean? You must tell me at once. Your—your appearance alarms me more than I can tell you."

He tried to laugh the matter off, but his mother would not be persuaded to change the subject.

"Well, then, if you must know, I will tell you when—we—are—alone," he said, a little unsteadily.

"You need not mind Mrs. Smith," she answered quickly. "I do not hesitate speaking before her on any topic."

Mercy rose hurriedly to her feet.

"I—I have finished my breakfast," she said, in the low voice she had assumed, and which so charmed everyone; "and if you will excuse me, I shall be grateful."

Fred bowed courteously; but Mrs. Worth held out a fluttering hand to stay her steps.

"Do not go very far, Mrs. Smith," she said.

"I may need you at any moment. Step into the conservatory and wait for further orders there."

With a bow of assent Mercy glided from the room. She was sorry that Mrs. Worth had requested her to remain in the conservatory, for she knew full well that more or less of the conversation between mother and son must needs reach her ears.

The door had no sooner closed behind the slim, retreating figure ere Mrs. Worth turned quickly to her son, who was now pacing up and down the breakfast-room, with his arms folded tightly over his breast, his head crested proudly erect, and a strange look in his eyes.

"Well, Fred," she said, at length, seeing that he was in no hurry to break the silence, "what is the matter? You used to tell your mother all your troubles when you were a little boy. Come to me with them now. Something has happened to disturb you greatly. I can see it in your face. Tell me what it is, my boy. Tell your mother what annoys you, my dear."

He stopped short before her.

"You are right, mother; something has happened to disturb me," he said. "I ought not to worry you with it, but if you care to hear it you shall know all. You remember a conversation we had several months ago about—about little Mercy, mother?"

"We did have a conversation about that girl, but I do not remember especially all that was said."

"You remember that I told you then, mother, that—that I still loved Mercy, and if ever I came across the man who lured her away from me it would go hard with him or with me."

Mrs. Worth looked at her handsome son with a frown on her face and an angry light in her eyes.

"I was in hopes that you were getting over that nonsense," she said, "especially since your betrothal to poor Agnes."

"I told you then, as I tell you now, mother, that I shall never forget Mercy, or cease to love her. But for the story I have to tell: An hour since, as I was taking an early morning stroll to get a cigar, a little incident happened which caused me to pause, and quite forget my errand. It was only a little lame boy singing for pennies on the street, and the song that he sung touched my heart, as it has not been touched for long months, and thrilled every fibre of my being with a sharp, keen pain."

"You have heard the same song, mother. You remember how I rose and abruptly left the room when some young girl commenced to sing it in our drawing-room only a few short weeks ago. To-day I listened to it, spell-bound; and the boy's accompaniment on the violin held me as one fascinated. I tried to move away, but I could not. As you can judge by what occurred afterward, there was a strange fate in my standing there."

"I stood quite still and listened to the well-remembered words which carried me back so forcibly to my own past with Mercy."

"Far away in summer meadows,
Where the merry sunbeams played,
Oft I linger'd 'mid the clover,
Singing to a village maid.
She was fairer than the fairest,
Ever faithful, fond and true,
And she wore beneath her bonnet
Amber tresses tied with blue."

"Ere the summer days departed,
We had made a solemn vow,
And I never, never wavered,
Kissing her sweet cheek and brow.
She was dearer than the dearest,
Pure as drops of morning dew,
And adown her back was hanging
Amber tresses tied with blue."

"'Twas decreed that fate should part us
Ere the leaves of autumn fell,
And two loving hearts were severed,
That had loved each other well.
She was all I had to cherish,
We have bade our last adieu,
Still I see in every vision
Amber tresses tied with blue."

Just at that moment a step sounded on the pavement.

"A man rushed down, hatless, from an adjacent mansion, and in a twinkling seized the offending young musician by the throat, and hurled him from the sidewalk, crying, fiercely,—

"I will teach you to come here every morning and to sing that accursed song of all others in front of my door. I have ordered you away twice before. I'll teach you better than to come back again."

"The unprovoked assault upon the helpless cripple awoke all the anger in my nature."

"I sprang forward and separated them; but when I saw who the cripple's assailant was, my amazement knew no bounds."

"It was the young doctor who comes here to attend Agnes."

"He turned on me with terrible ferocity; then I recognised the fumes of wine in his breath."

"This is the second time you have interfered in my business, Worth," he cried, fairly foaming with rage. "Once when you attempted to take Mercy Wood from me on the Greenwich boat, and—now."

"I fell back as though he had struck me a terrible blow. In an instant I recognised him. I had been looking for him ever since Mercy's flight. I had caught but a fleeting glimpse of him in the past, and his whiskers made such a change in him, no wonder I did not recognise him as he crossed our threshold, and this accounted for the manner in which he had avoided me in my own household."

"You! you fiend incarnate! Have I found you at last? I could kill you here and now," I cried, as my fingers tightened around his throat. "But I will give you one chance to save yourself. Name your own place as to where you will meet me. I did not recognise you before. You shall tell what you have done with Mercy Wood, or I will kill you!"

"Those words seemed to recall him to his

senses. He drew back defiantly, and his flashing black eyes met mine, while a terrible sneer curled his lips.

"You shall never know whether Mercy Wood is living or dead!" he cried.

"I could have borne anything better than those scathing words from the lips of the man who had taken from me the girl I loved.

"You will find me at home up to the hour of noon," he said. "Make any arrangements you deem necessary."

"I turned on my heel and left him; and here I am, awaiting a summons from him."

Mrs. Worth had risen slowly to her feet. The import of his words had just begun to dawn upon her.

"Fred," she cried, wildly, throwing herself upon her knees at his feet, "is it to be a duel? Oh, Fred, answer me!"

They heard a crash in the conservatory, but both were too excited to mind it.

"You must not—you shall not meet this man, my son!"

"Let me go in your place," cried a hoarse voice from the doorway of the conservatory. "Pardon me, but I could not help overhearing all;" and Mrs. Smith advanced excitedly into the breakfast-room, and up to Fred's side. "Let me go in your place," she repeated. "Let me give my life for yours. I—I have nothing to live for; you have."

Fred was deeply touched.

"You forget your little child," he said, gently. "Besides, any man might reasonably take up the quarrel of a lady, and, if need be, die in her defence, be she friend or stranger; but no woman should make such a sacrifice for a man. I thank you for the kindness of heart that prompted the words; but it cannot be. I am sorry that you overheard my words to my mother. See! she has swooned away. I beg that you will take care of her, and let none of the household know what is about to occur."

(To be continued.)

THE FAMILY DISGRACE.

—10:—

(Continued from page 345.)

"You are right, Miss Dare; but even although I knew the truth I was inclined to doubt it, because my boy was rarely at fault in his analysis of character. Then when I heard a rumour of your broken contract I hoped your better self had conquered. I deceived myself; child, you are very young to be so mercenary."

She lifted her head indignantly.

"You are unjust to me; it is true I—I loved your son, and had fate been kinder to me I would have clung to his memory all my life long. But my mother and I are alone in the world; we were destitute, starving, and Sir Grattan Freke came to our rescue. I had nothing to give him but my hand—Heaven knows I give it freely."

"You were neither starving nor destitute when I came to you at Trevenan House!" her companion answered, coldly, "but you had already forgotten your promise to my boy."

"You—came—to—Trevenan—House! When was that?"

"Late in August; you were from home; I saw Sir Grattan Freke and learned the truth from him. I did not care to see you then, because I was shaken with the news—the glad news which had followed so swiftly on the heels of evil tidings, and I was full of anger that you could so easily have forgotten my boy."

"I have never forgotten him, but—forgive me if I seem stupid—I do not quite understand why you should be so angry with me—it was in September I became engaged to Sir Grattan—Oscar was dead, and I did not care much what became of me."

"Thank Heaven, he is not dead! That was the message I brought you."

She swayed toward him, her face livid and her eyes wild; her little hands grasped his in frenzied fashion.

"Not dead!" she gasped, "not dead! Oh,

Heaven, they never told me. I never knew! You must be jesting with me! Oscar! Oscar! Oscar! I had better be dead than know this thing!"

"Hush!" said the dean, all the sternness gone from his face and voice, "remember where you are! It is true that my son still lives, although his name appeared in the list of the killed; he, however, never left New York, being prevented from so doing by a press of business, but seeing an account of the accident in the papers, he at once telegraphed to me, begging me to personally assure you of his safety, as all correspondence between you was forbidden. I was too ill to undertake the journey for a fortnight, and when I reached Trevenan, it was only to be told that Oscar was cast aside for a more eligible *parti*. Heaven forgive me if I wrote too harshly of you to my boy in the hope that I should kill his love—he is prospering beyond his highest dreams, but you have spoiled his life."

White as death she rose and confronted him.

"It would be useless to defend myself now, or even to send him any message that might win his pity and pardon. Let him think me false, if, in thinking that he may forget and be happy. I am bound hand and foot. I cannot help myself if I would; but that I loved and was loyal to him to the end; that I love and honour him still you must not doubt. Try to think kindly of me, for no woman on earth is more wretched than I."

Before he could reply his hostess had swooped down upon them.

"It is too bad of you, Daisy," she said, smiling, "to monopolise the dean so entirely. You have done so much to detract from your popularity that for your sake I shall carry him off. Mercy, child! how white you look!"

"I am only tired; will you please send mamma to me?" but even before Mrs. Dare could join her Grattan was by her side.

"You are ill," he said, bending over her, whilst all his manhood was shaken with a great dread; but she answered quietly,—

"Yes; let us get away; I have over-estimated my strength."

That homeward drive was very silent, Daisy leaning back in her corner with closed eyes and pallid face, Lena full of anxiety, and Grattan Freke in a very agony of torment.

He wanted time for thought, and he would gladly have left Daisy at her aunt's door, but she held out a detaining hand, saying, with something like command in her voice,—

"Come in, if you please; I want to talk with you—alone," and he had no alternative but to follow.

She led the way to a small room in the rear of the house; it looked out upon the garden so lovely now in its summer dress, and sinking into a chair Daisy flung the window wide, as though she found it hard to breathe.

He stood in silence beside her.

Presently she asked, heavily,—

"Is this thing true?"

"Be more explicit, if you please," he answered, half sullenly.

"Is it true that, even before last September, you knew that Oscar Lytton had escaped death; that you wilfully and wantonly deceived me, assuring his father that I—I, who was half broken-hearted—was already your promised wife?"

"Heaven forgive me, Daisy; it is true. Let me confess to you now; deceit will not help me much, and I can only plead my love as excuse for my conduct. You had driven out with Mrs. Denison when Mr. Lytton was announced. Through some mistake he was brought to me, and in answer to his communication I gave him the assurance of our betrothal. It was cowardly and dishonourable I admit, but all is fair in love or war, and I would have done far worse deeds than feel you were wrested from me just when hope was highest. The dean left me in a white rage—"

"Did my aunt know of this?" interrupted the girl, coldly.

"No; the secret was my own; but for that meddling old fool you never would have learned it. Daisy, cannot you pardon me?"

Her weary head drooped low.

"You ask a hard thing of me."

"It may seem so now; but on my honour I believe that you were growing to love me; and in a little while it would not seem so hard to forgive me, because had you been less dear to me I never should have sinned in such fashion."

"Love should be unselfish. Oh, how could you do it? How could you bear to see me eating out my very heart with grief for his supposed death, and yet not say one word to comfort me? How could you stoop so low as to steal away another's promised wife? Oh, often—as often—I have prayed to die because my burden was greater than I could bear. I was all alone in the world. You took advantage of my loneliness and weakness."

"Strike hard," he said, under his breath. "I deserve it all; but women are sometimes pitiful to those who through love have wronged them. My temptation was great, and I succumbed to it. Now, I suppose you will take back your promise, claim the freedom you desire? I hoped you were forgetting. I felt in myself the power to make you happy; now you can only despise me, and what my after-life may be cannot matter in the least to you."

She lifted her head, and looking long at him, her eyes softened; he had sinned sorely, but he loved her dearly; to him she owed her mother's life, their present companionship. Slowly and wearily she rose.

"I am too much your debtor," she said, "to break my bond. I could not take my freedom if I would. Oh! I wish I had never seen you. I wish I had never accepted your help, your charity. I am fettered, hand and foot—your slave—"

She paused suddenly, so great was the trouble of his face, so despairing the look of his dark eyes, and, then, because she knew all the pangs of hapless, hopeless love so well, her heart melted within her, and stretching out her hands to him she cried,—

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me! My pain has made me unjust. I have promised to be your wife. I shall not break my word. You have something to forgive, even as I. Oh, you poor Grattan! what weak creatures love makes of us all!" She crept a little nearer; then, laying her clasped hands upon his breast, "you gave me back my mother from the very jaws of death. You loved me all through my coldness and disdain. You have lavished gifts upon me with so generous a hand that I have sometimes been humbled to the dust, feeling how poor a thing I was to win so great a regard. If the duty and affection of that poor thing can satisfy you, take them, and—Heaven help us to be tolerant towards each other."

"Do you mean?" he asked, breathlessly, "that you are still willing to marry me, knowing all I, Daisy, is it true?"

"It is quite true," she answered, steadily. "When I first heard Mr. Lytton's story I felt I never could forgive you, I never could trust you any more. But now the bitterness is gone, and because of all your goodness in the past, let what will come, I shall never reproach you—"

"Will you kiss me in token of full and perfect pardon?" he asked, humbly.

For a moment she hesitated, then, remembering her promise and all it entailed, she kissed him once upon the mouth; afterwards she was glad that she had been kind to him in this dark hour.

He went away early; never in all his life had he been so sorely humbled, never had he felt his own shortcomings so acutely, his unworthiness of this girl, who was more to him than all else the world could give. Honestly he fought with his own desire, but it was too strong for him; he could not yield her to another man; he would rather hold her his even though she hated him than know she looked love into other eyes, smiled upon some more fortunate wretch than he. His last waking thoughts were,—

"She shall love me yet; his first as the fresh dawn broke, 'she pities me—pity is akin to love. Lytton shall not triumph in the end.'"

Contrary to his usual custom he rose early and rode out into the country unattended. He wanted time for thought; he seemed to have lost all his strong identity. He only felt that Daisy was inexpressibly dear to him, and that she could but

despise him. The morning broadened and brightened, the world was all astir, but he took no count of passing moments, nor heeded the way he took.

Noon came, sultry and oppressive; Daisy, lingering in a shaded room with her mother and Mrs. Denison, wondered a little at Grattan's non-appearance, and a sense of evil was upon her, which, try as she would, she could not shake off. The day was too hot for exertion of any kind, and the ladies had just determined to remain at home, when the hall bell was violently rung.

"Visitors," said Mrs. Denison vexedly, "and I am stupid with sleep."

Presently she was called from the room by a servant, who acted in a most mysterious and unusual fashion; pausing outside, he said impressively, "If you please, ma'am Doctor Lingard, says it must not be broken suddenly to Miss Dare, but Sir Grattan has met with a bad accident, and it aint likely he'll recover. But he's conscious, and would like to see her at once, as he's dying."

"Dying!" she paused; then to herself she said, "It is vain to kick against the pricks—there is a curse on this marriage."

CHAPTER VIII.

DYING! with happiness all but within his grasp, in the pride and glory of perfected manhood! Oh, it was hard! There was no hope, and every breath the sufferer drew came fraught with pain. But all that was best and noblest in him rose now to the surface; patient and uncomplaining he lay helpless upon his bed. He had made all necessary preparations for the end, he had neglected nothing; all that could be converted into cash had gone to purchase an annuity for Daisy, so securing her mother's comfort and her own, the estates were strictly entailed, and from these she could receive nothing.

Now he turned with a wistful look to her. "My house is set in order; I shall be ready to go at any moment; this at least ends all our doubts and difficulties; but you will stay with me to the last!"

She answered sobbingly "yes," and took his hand in hers.

"You will not think harshly of me now; one does not speak evil of the dead, and I shall soon be gathered to them; it is tetter so!—better so! but it is hard. If we could go together! Ah, I forgot; it is your happiness to remain, and so I am willing to part with you on this side of the grave."

Daisy was crying quietly, hushing her sobs that she might hear the last words the failing voice could utter.

"Thank Heaven, I have been able to save you from want; I owed you that recompense, my beloved. I wronged you so bitterly."

"Do not speak of such things now; remember only your goodness to my mother."

"That commenced only through self-interest; I can no more deceive you than myself as to my motives; but I loved you so dearly, Daisy mine, that I think I would have stayed at nothing to win you. You will forgive me now fully and freely."

"Oh, most fully, most freely! Why will you hurt yourself with such thoughts? Do not I owe you all I have? If Heaven in its mercy should give you back to me."

"Ah!"—he had risen amongst his pillows. "Would you take me then, maimed, helpless it might be for life?"

"Yes, I would," she answered bravely, although her eyes were wet.

Presently he said, "No such sacrifice will be demanded of you; my day is nearly over, and so far as I could I have repaired my errors. I have written through your mother to Mr. Lytton to come to me; if he is too late you will tell him all my story; there are happy days in store for you and—for Oscar Lytton."

But no reply reached them from the Dean, and at first Grattan wondered over this, but as death drew nearer he ceased to think of these things. It may be doubted if he retained consciousness of anything save Daisy's absence or presence.

So he lay for a week, then just at the close of the sweet day, his eyes opened, his lips tremulously framed the one beloved name "Daisy;" the sun shone full upon his white, glorified face—then, as it sank to rest behind a bank of purple clouds, he faintly smiled, and smiling died. Outside a thrush broke into maddest melody; a boy in the street beyond sang gaily, there was the noise of "moving wheels and multitudes astir;" it seemed a very mockery of grief to the girl who knelt weeping unrestrainedly for one who, with all his faults, had loved her truly. Mrs. Dare drew down the blinds, and "merry was the world though he was dead."

"Come away, my darling, he does not need you any more."

In obedience to that gentle voice Daisy rose, cast one glance at the silent figure, the face upon which all the majesty of death now rested; then she went out. In the corridor a servant bearing a letter met mother and daughter; it was from the dean's solicitor, and read,—

"DEAR MADAM,—

"I have but just glanced through my late client's papers; amongst his letters I found one dictated by Sir Grattan Freke, written by yourself, begging for an interview. I regret to say that Mr. Lytton died quite suddenly on the twenty-first, and his funeral took place yesterday. Unfortunately Mr. Oscar Lytton could not reach England in time for the last sad ceremony; it is now extremely improbable that he will return home, but if you desire it, I will forward the letter to him. Awaiting your instructions, I am, dear Madam,

"Yours respectfully,

"JOHN WHITEHEAD."

Mrs. Dare glanced at Daisy.

"Do nothing," said the girl, "he may have forgotten. Do not speak of him now to me; it seems like profanity," and her mother, respecting her wish, referred to the subject no more.

Sir Grattan was buried with his ancestors in the old family vault, and perhaps there was no one to mourn his untimely end save the girl who had never loved him as he desired to be loved, but who must always remember him with grateful affection, since to him she owed her mother's life, and her own prosperity. Of Oscar she would not permit herself to think; as yet it was sacrilege to her tender heart and pure mind to put another in the dead man's place. And the funeral being over, she and her mother took a pretty cottage in a rural district, Daisy secretly resolving to take no part or lot in the gay world Aunt Denison prized.

A year went slowly and peacefully by. Mrs. Denison, offended by her sister's and Daisy's choice, had started for Madeira with a party of friends, giving as her excuse for the journey that her health was failing her signally; and the Dares lived quietly together. They rarely spoke of the past. Oscar's name was a dead letter between them, but the mother's quick instinct divined the secret of her daughter's heart, and she resolved to ascertain, if possible, whether Oscar Lytton yet lived, and if he still clung to his old allegiance. Acting upon this resolve, she wrote Mr. Whitehead, receiving in reply the communication that Mr. Lytton was in England, having concluded his business in New York, which had prospered beyond all his expectations; he was yet unmarried, and indeed seemed singularly averse to the society of ladies. He was at present staying at his old chambers close to Euston Square. Then followed the address, and the next day Mrs. Dare, having invented some excuse for her journey, ran up to town. It is needless to say that Oscar Lytton was considerably surprised to receive a visit from a lady, but her fair sweet face prepossessed him in her favour, and the soft brown eyes recalled Daisy as he had first known her, to his memory. He was scarcely astonished when he learned his visitor's identity; but a little frigidity crept into his manner as he inquired her errand.

Then Lena began her story, a little awkwardly at first, but as she pleaded her child's cause she warmed to her subject and grew eloquent.

She told of Daisy's struggles, of the pressure brought to bear upon her by Mrs. Denison, of her despair and subsequent indifference to all things when the news of his death reached her. Then she touched gently upon Sir Grattan's sin against them both, of Daisy's flight to her, and their bitter struggle for bread.

Oscar's face grew instinct with feeling, and when she told of his rival's unflinching goodness to them in their adversity the wrath in his heart against him melted like snow before the sun. As the low, eloquent voice died out, he asked gently,—

"What would you have me do? Why have you told me this story?"

"I—I thought—I hoped that perhaps—you still loved my child."

"Assuming that to be a fact," he answered, "what follows?"

He had risen, and stood looking down into the dingy street.

Lena, made bold by mother-love, followed him there.

"Daisy never wronged you by word or deed; and, oh, don't you understand that my one desire is to see her happy?"

"You mean that she still cares?"

"Yes; perhaps I am wrong to show you so much of her heart; but she is all I have, and for my sake she did violence to her love. I cannot believe that you have changed. You have true eyes, and I think Daisy could never have given her whole soul to one unworthy of it."

He turned quickly towards her.

"I love her with every breath of my life," he said, in a low, intense tone. "I was a brute ever to doubt her truth. Let us go to her. If she will forgive me she shall never have another wretched hour because of me."

"There is no need for preparation. Joy never kills. Go in; you will find her alone in her favourite room," so spoke Lena four hours later, and obeying her, with his heart beating hard and fast, Oscar turned the handle of the door.

Daisy was sitting with drooped head in a listless attitude. The day had been weary, and she was tired of solitude; but she turned as he entered, and seeing him, gave a quick, glad cry. In his eyes she read love and renewed faith. She stayed to learn nothing more, but ran to meet him with trembling, outstretched hands.

"You have come back to me! Oh, my dear! oh, my dear! I never hoped to see this day!"

Then she was in his arms, safe in the love which was to crown all her happy life to come. The clouds which had shadowed her path rolled back until only the silver lining remained, and a great peace fell upon the lovers as they stood locked in each other's embrace.

Well, they were married—to Mrs. Denison's infinite disgust. She absolutely refused to countenance such a *mésalliance*; but when Daisy's first baby was born, and the young mother's life was in jeopardy, her pride and strength failed her; love made her weak and brought her to her darling's side. Despite her age, she was an indefatigable nurse, and between herself and Lena the relations grew less strained.

As the years went by, and prosperity crowned Oscar's genius and labour, she relented so far as to take him into her favour, when she, lying dying, it was beneath his roof where she received that kindness and tenderness she had not dared to hope for.

Her last words were to Lena,—

"I have made you tardy reparation, and you are too gentle to nurse one harsh thought against me. When I am gone there will be no one to mourn for me, as they will mourn for you:—
"THE FAMILY DISGRACE."

[THE END.]

TELEPHONE operators in Belgium, many of whom, as in other countries, are girls, are required, now that the Government has absorbed the business, to pass an examination in Flemish, French, German and English. They must also have a good knowledge of geography, and be able to draw a complete map of Europe.

FACETIÆ.

JAGSON says it is evident that the man who talks about the silent watches of the night doesn't sleep with a Waterbury under his pillow.

"I beg a thousand pardons for coming so late." "My dear sir," replied the lady, graciously, "no pardons are needed—you can never come too late."

ARTIST: "I suppose you're joking, to offer a dollar for a picture like this? Why, the canvas cost that!" Picture dealer: "Very likely, my good sir; but when you bought it, it was clean."

BRIDE (just after the wedding): "Alfred, you promised to give me a grand surprise after we were married; say, what is it?" Bridegroom (a widower): "I've got six children, my pet."

"PA, what is a special providence?" "It occurs when some other fellow is a victim of a misfortune that would otherwise have happened to yourself."

COLONEL (to friend's little four-year-old daughter home with her parents on leave): "And so, my little girl, you have been to India?" Little girl (airily): "Oh, I just went there to be born, and then I came here."

PASSENGER: "Captain, there's a lady standing on the dock who wishes to speak to you before the boat pulls off." Captain (hurrying up on deck and looking in the direction indicated): "Lady be hanged! That's my wife!"

"Yes," sighed an old maid, "the age of chivalry is gone! Things are different now from what they were when I was a girl." "Yes, the nineteenth century has brought some marvellous changes."

JOHN: "James, why don't you come to see me oftener?" James (one of those muddle-headed people): "If our house was as near your house as your house is to ours I would be over every day."

A GIRL (neighbour): "And so you have a little baby at your house? Is it a boy or a girl?" Little Boy: "Mamma thinks it's a boy, but I guess it'll turn out a girl. It's always crying about nothing."

FIRST REPORTER: "Charley is what I call a first-rate newspaper-man. He always represents things just as they are." Second ditto: "But he isn't good for anything when it comes to representing things as they are not."

BRIGGS: "Just for a joke, I told Miss Elderly, the other day, that when she laughed it was all I could do not to kiss her." Griggs: "What happened?" Briggs: "The next time I saw her she nearly died laughing."

MASHINGTON (who is taking his leave): "Aw, it seems to me, Miss Moreleigh, I have fawgotten something. Aw—let me see." Miss Moreleigh: "Your gloves, perhaps?" Mashington: "Oh, no. Now I wemember. Aw—will you mawry me?"

"You are working too hard," said a policeman to a man who was drilling a hole in a safe at two o'clock in the morning. "What's that?" asked the burglar in a disconcerted tone as he looked into the muzzle of the policeman's revolver. "I say you need arrest."

DONBINS: "I hear your son intends to make his debut as an actor next week?" Jobbins: "So I hear." Donbins: "What will he be most apt to appear in?" Jobbins: "Well, if he depends on his talent for a living, I think he will eventually appear in the poorhouse."

HUSBAND: "What do you do when you hit your thumb with a hammer? You can't swear." Wife: "No, but I can think, with all my might and main, what a perfectly horrid, mean inconsiderate, selfish brute you are not to drive the nails yourself."

"You sit on your horse like a butcher," said a pert young officer, who happened to be of royal blood, to a veteran general, who was somewhat bent from age. "It is highly probable," responded the old warrior, with a grim smile, "it is because all my life I've been leading calves like you to the slaughter."

"Ah, me valet tells me I'm going to a wedding to-morrow. Miss Williamson's to be married to some fellow; you know, but I can't think of his confounded name." "Why, old man, you're to marry her yourself." "By Jove! so I am. What a memory you've got."

ONE WAY OUT.—The husband (on his death-bed): "My darling, when I am gone, how will you ever be able to pay the doctor's bill?" The wife: "Don't worry about that, dear. If worst comes to worst, I can marry the doctor, you know."

IGNORAMUS: "You just used the expression *fin de siècle*. What does it mean?" Cultured Party: "It is French, and means end of the century." Ignoramus: "Then why don't you say 'end of the century'?" Cultured Party: "Because that isn't French."

"Why, Bridget," she exclaimed, "for whom are you in black?" "For poor Tim, me furrst husband, mum. When he died I was that poor I couldn't, but I said if iver I could, I would; and me new man, Mike, is as generous as a lord."

AT THE LODGING-HOUSE.—Meeker: "Mary." Mary: "Yes, sir." Meeker: "Take back this cup, and bring me something else." Mary: "What will you have, coffee or tea?" Meeker: "Oh, I am not particular. If this is coffee, give me tea; and if it's tea, give me coffee."

DIFFERENT MANNERS.—His City Niece: "Uncle, uncle, don't! It's very impolite to eat with your knife." Uncle Elihu: "Hang impoliteness! I let you eat with your fork when you came out to Punkville this summer, didn't I, and never let on how funny it looked to us."

FATAL DELAY.—"I hain't goin' to try that rule about countin' twenty when you are mad any more," said Willie to his mother. "And why not, my son?" "Because Simmy Bobbs thrun a stone at me to-day, an' before I got to fifteen he ran away, an' I couldn't lick him."

FRIEND: "Why don't you marry?" Good-fello: "Can't." "You have a fine house?" "Yes." "And a good income?" "Yes." "Then what's the matter?" "My housekeeper and her servants have formed a union, and if I marry outside of their union, they'll strike."

FENDERSON: "There was a gentleman here this morning. I asked him his name, and he told me I would find it in the directory. And do you know I've looked the directory through, and I can't find it." Fogg: "But what was his name?" "I haven't the remotest idea; but isn't it odd that I can't find it?"

REGENT-STREET.—Miss Southsea: "Good gracious, what beastly weather! Damp, cold, snow; it is enough to give one the doldrums. It's dry at present, but it's sure to rain before long." Miss Gorton: "You are quite accurate; in fact, I can feel it expektorating with rain now."

A GENTLEMAN was once helping at a bazaar by reciting on and off during the evening. He had recited once, and the people were sitting about chatting, when he heard one of the committee go up to the chairman and whisper:—"Hada't Mr. — better give us another recitation?" Whereupon the chairman replied:—"No, not yet; let them enjoy themselves a bit longer."

AFTER a trial about a warranty of bullocks, which immediately followed a trial about some lambs, Serjeant Shee proposed to take a case relating to the quality of turnip seed on the following day, instead of immediately going on with it. "Certainly not, brother Shee," replied the judge. "I have kept the jury two days on lamb and beef, and I am not going to bring them here for another day to keep them on turnips."

"HAW—ER—have whichever you like, Miss White. Which do you like best," said Mr. Black, when showing his last photos, taken in a variety of positions, to a circle of lady friends. "Well," said Miss White, after a thoughtful scrutiny, "I like this one far the best, but that one is much the most like you." Miss White, who is given to expressing herself awkwardly, becomes conscious that she has said something wrong, but cannot for the life of her think what.

"ARE we all here?" inquired Mr. Brutal Jones of his landlady, at the breakfast table the other morning. "I think so; one, two, three, four; yes, you are all here, I believe, and she smiled sweetly. "Why?" "Nothing much, only I see by the morning paper that a human skeleton was picked up just outside the town limits." The smile vanished.

A DISAPPOINTED fish-peddler, was belabouring his slow but patient horse in a Boston street the other day, and calling out his wares at intervals, as "Hevin', hevin', fresh hevin'!" A tender-hearted lady, seeing the act of cruelty to the horse called out sternly, "Have you no mercy?" "No, mum," was the reply; "nothin', but hevin'."

A TEST OF TRUE GENTILITY.—"What's the new lodger like, Mariamant?" "He's no gentleman, whatever he's like!" "No gentleman? What's he been and done?" "Why, heeze me carrying out the coals, an' e says, 'I'm afraid that scuttles too heavy for you,' e says, 'pray, let me carry it!' e says, 'An' e up and carries it 'iself, just like a footman!'"

PRETTY PASSENGER: "Captain, did the ship really make twenty knots every hour last night?" The Captain: "Yes, miss." Pretty Passenger: "And what do you do with so many knots?" Captain (gruffly): "Toasted 'em overboard." Pretty Passenger: "Oh, how queer! I thought the sailors had to untie them, during the day."

"I LIKE the description of this place," a company-promoter was heard observing to another not long, with reference to a building estate in Australia, "and I think the sketches you show me of the land promise well; but I wish you would show me on the map, exactly where the spot is." "Well," replied the other, "the fact is that I have not yet decided where on the map it has got to be."

THE LATEST ARTIFICE.—"Dunn has played me a mean trick." "He has? In what way?" "I sent him to you a few days ago to collect that little bill you owe me, and the knave hasn't turned up yet. Likely as not he has appropriated it." "I—er—I—the fact is, I didn't pay him; but I will pay you now, and you can send me a receipt." "Oh, ah. I didn't think—thank you. I was mistaken about Dunn, after all."

A YOUNG Lancashire lad joined the army, and soon after his arrival at headquarters got into trouble. Accordingly, he had to face his commanding officer next morning. The usual preliminaries were gone through, when, contrary to orderly-room etiquette, the recruit commenced to defend himself. "Silence!" roared the adjutant. "Thou shut up," said the prisoner. "I'm not speaking to thee. I'm talking to the old chap in the chair."

"Yes," said the old man, addressing his young visitor, "I'm proud of my girls, and should like to see them all comfortably married; and as I've made a little money, they won't go to their husband's penniless. There's Mary, twenty-five years old, and a real good girl; I shall give her a thousand pounds when she marries; then comes Ber, she won't see thirty-five again, and shall have two thousand; and the man who takes Eliza, who is forty, will have three thousand with her." The young man reflected a minute, and then nervously inquired, "You haven't one about fifty, have you?"

ALEXANDER DUMAS, the great French novelist, had in his character much of the natural comicality of the negro race, from which he was in part sprung. His son, Alexander Dumas fils, was notably lacking in this quality, and the father was fond of making pleasant little jokes at his expense. Once, when the father was visiting the son, Alexander junior invited Alexander senior into his garden, which is said to have been somewhat larger than a good-sized pocket handkerchief. They sat under the one little tree in this garden and fanned themselves. "I am suffocating," said Alexander senior. "What shall I do, pere?" asked Alexander junior. "Better open your chamber window, and let a little air out into your garden!" said Alexander pere.

SOCIETY.

THE Empress of Austria has invited the Prince and Princess of Wales to visit her at Corfu during their approaching cruise in the Royal yacht *Osborne*.

THE Prince of Wales contemplates visiting the World's Fair at Chicago, and proposes to cross the Atlantic in the Royal yacht *Osborne*. Should this arrangement be carried out, it will be necessary to furnish an adequate convoy, not merely for the sake of dignity, but in order to supply the *Osborne* with coal from time to time.

It is reported that the Emperor William is endeavouring to arrange a marriage between his sister-in-law, Princess Feodore of Schleswig-Holstein, the youngest daughter of the late Duke of Augustenberg, and the Grand Duke Ernest of Hesse. Princess Feodore, who will not be nineteen until next July, is nearly sixteen years younger than her eldest sister, the German Empress.

THE Empress Frederick intends to reside at Berlin until after the marriage of Princess Margaret and Prince Frederick of Hesse, which is to take place there during this month. The Empress will then come to England for a few weeks, during which period she is to be the guest of the Queen at Osborne and at Windsor Castle. Early in March the Empress Frederick is going to Athens on a visit to the Duke and Duchess of Sparta; and about the middle of April she will take up her residence at Homburg, until her new château at Cronberg in the Taunus is quite ready for occupation.

MONTAGU WILLIAMS played many parts in his life, which, after all, was a short one, for he has died at fifty-seven. He was a school teacher, a soldier, and an actor before he hit on the line in which he was supreme. And, strange to say, it was his actor father-in-law who turned him aside from the stage to the bar. Everyone has heard how, when he was at the zenith of his success, the doctor found a growth in his throat and pronounced sentence of death; how a successful operation was performed, and how the famous advocate with his health restored, but his voice nearly gone, was compelled to relinquish his profession. It was the one happy thought of Mr. Matthews to make him a police magistrate. No better appointment was ever made.

An interesting addition has been made to the Queen's collection of photographs at Windsor Castle. The stall-canopies in St. George's Chapel are surmounted by a curious series of carved and painted wooden busts, which are divided into three groups. The first consists of twenty-four portraits of the reign of Henry VII., of the personages who were then Knights of the Garter, all represented in the surcoat and mantle of the Order. The second group consists of seven busts, dated 1786, when the Order of the Garter was enlarged by George III. The remaining busts date from the second enlargement of the Order in 1895, and come down into the present reign. A series of large photographs of these busts has been taken by command of the Queen, and have been added to the collection in the Royal library.

THERE is reason to believe that the Queen will not herself hold any more Drawing Rooms. For years past it has been Her Majesty's custom to retire from the Throne Room before the Drawing Room was half over, leaving the larger portion of the general company to be received by the Princess of Wales. One result of this practice was a series of frantic and most unseemly struggles to reach the Throne Room early, and on several occasions the altercations at the barriers between the eager, angry and excited dames were so loud and violent that sounds of the conflict penetrated to the Royal circle. Another result has been a very large increase in the number of special applications for the "day" *entrée*, all of which go before the Queen, who deals herself with these requests. There is, it is considered, little reason why the Queen should continue to hold the Drawing Rooms, especially as she always suffers from headache and general *malaise* for several hours after one of these wearying functions.

STATISTICS.

THREE times as many herrings are consumed as any other kind of fish.

Of the total number of 109,000 locomotive engines which are at present running on the earth's surface, Europe claims 63,000, America 40,000, Asia 3,300, Australia 2,000, and Africa 700.

A WATCH is usually composed of 98 pieces, and its manufacture embraces over 2,000 distinct operations. Some of its screws are so small as to be imperceptible to the unaided eye; and the slit in the heads of these screws is 2-1000ths of an inch in width.

THE commonest flowers are white ones, of which there are 1,119 kinds, and of these one-sixth are fragrant. Of the 951 kinds of yellow flowers seventy-seven are odoriferous; of the 823 red kinds, eighty-four; of the 594 blue kinds, thirty-one; of the 308 violet-blue kinds, thirteen. Of the 210 kinds with combined colours, twenty-eight are fragrant. The various delightful or disagreeable odours of plants generally reside in the flowers, though in some their seat is in the leaves or stems, but in either case the odour is due to the presence of volatile essential oils of a more or less resinous nature.

GEMS.

FAR higher is the office of the teacher who makes admirable men than that of the sculptor or painter who makes admirable imitations of them.

THERE are times when to speak frankly of one's own convictions is a duty which cannot be evaded without insincerity. But for one such occasion there are twenty where no such asseveration is needed, where no good is done by it, and where only personal vanity is gratified.

LIKE flakes of snow that fall unperceived upon the earth, the seemingly unimportant events of life succeed one another. As the snow gathers together, so are our habits formed. No single flake that is added to the pile produces a sensible change; no single action creates, however it may exhibit, a man's character.

As we travel the way of life, says Mr. Ruskin, we have the choice, according to our working, of turning all the voices of nature into one song of rejoicing, and all her lifeless creations into a glad company, whereof the meanest shall be beautiful in our eyes by its kind message; or of withering and quenching her sympathy into a fearful withdrawn silence of condemnation, or into a crying out of her stones and a shaking off her dust against us.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

Do not let fresh fish lie in water, as it makes them soft and unfit to eat.

INSTEAD of toasting bread for pea-soup, try drying it or roasting it till crisp in the oven, and see how superior it will be.

CAKE DELICIOUS.— $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. flour, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. sifted sugar, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. butter, three eggs, one teaspoon cream of tartar, $\frac{1}{2}$ gill milk, half teaspoon baking powder, one teaspoon vanilla; made in the usual way, and baked in a very gentle oven; this is the only recipe for this cake I have.

BREAD WITH YEAST.—2½ lbs. flour, 1 oz. German yeast, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon sugar. Mix the salt in the flour. Mix the German yeast and the sugar in a bowl, add about 2 breakfastcupfuls of water, which must be only tepid or lukewarm. Pour this in among the flour, and add as much more as may be necessary to wet all the flour. Give it a good mixing with the hand or spoon, cover over, set in a warm place to rise for 1½ hours, then take out and knead again, adding more flour if necessary; shape into loaves. Set to rise again for 15 minutes, and then bake in the oven.

MISCELLANEOUS.

STOCKINGS first came into use in the eleventh century. Before that, cloth bandages were wound around the feet.

THE condor is the highest flying bird known. It spends most of its time floating three miles above sea level.

JERUSALEM has become prosperous again since the completion of the railroad that connects it with Jaffa. Over three hundred houses, hotels, stores and residences have been erected.

A NUMBER of carriage horses have been lately purchased at Rugby for the King of Italy, including a team for his Majesty's state coach.

THE largest book ever known is owned by Queen Victoria. It is eighteen inches thick and weighs sixty-three pounds, and contains the addresses of congratulation on the occasion of her Jubilee.

SCHUBERT was a rapid worker. He often composed the music of three or four songs in a single night. He died at the early age of thirty-one, yet in his brief life he composed over six hundred songs besides several operas and masses.

THE phonograph is put to an excellent use by the Queen of Italy, who, while she often improvises charming little melodies, is unable afterward to repeat them. A phonograph is therefore placed on the piano when she plays, and thus her impromptus are saved from oblivion.

It is said that the assumption of the violet by the Imperialists dates from Napoleon's last day at Fontainebleau, when a child who was playing in the gardens ran up to the Emperor with a little bunch of violets in his hand, saying he hoped he would be back before the violets bloomed again. To which the great man, who had just signed his abdication, replied that he accepted them as an augury, and, turning to his suite, begged they would use the violet as their badge henceforth.

A RUSSIAN lady has invented something new which has at least much originality. The Russian coachman wears the caftan, and, above this, a belt of a bright colour. This *grande dame*, who must at least be very coquette, has had attached to this belt a good-sized looking-glass, in which the fair dame can admire herself; and it also serves a second use, for as these small Russian carriages are all open ones, she can see perfectly well the gentlemen who are following her.

A GERMAN paper designates how you can tell if a paper is hand-made. A roll or strip of paper about an inch wide should be placed gently in water, so that the upper surface is kept dry. In machine-made paper the two sides will unroll in the direction of the centre; but in hand-made paper the sides will unfold in the form of a plate. This indicates that the fibres in the hand-made paper are equally disposed as to length and breadth, while in machine-made paper they are chiefly extended in length.

In Austria a man and woman are supposed to be capable of conducting a home of their own from the age of fourteen. In Germany the man must be at least eighteen years of age. In France the man eighteen and the woman fifteen. In Belgium the same ages. In Spain the intended husband must have passed his fourteenth year and the woman her twelfth. In Hungary, for Roman Catholics, the man must be fourteen years old and the woman twelve; for Protestants the man must be eighteen and the woman fifteen. In Greece the man must have seen at least fourteen summers, and the woman twelve. In Portugal a man of fourteen is considered marriageable, and a woman of twelve. In Russia and Saxony they are a little more sensible, and a youth must refrain from entering into the bonds of matrimony till he can count eighteen years, and the woman till she can count sixteen. In Switzerland the men from the age of fourteen and the women from the age of twelve are allowed to marry. In Turkey any youth and maiden who can walk properly and can understand the necessary religious service are allowed to be united for life.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ANXIETY.—A lodger's goods cannot be seized for the landlord's rent.

UNHAPPY ONE.—No, while you know that your husband is alive you cannot legally marry again.

MARR.—The correct ring-finger of an engaged man is the second of the left hand.

ROMANIE.—You can get any of "Ouida's" novels by order through your local bookseller.

LUCIFER.—The method is patented in England. The other matches imitating them are manufactured abroad.

TRIULATION.—It might be possible to have an action against the brother for helping to steal your furniture.

BONY BEE.—Orange peel, dried and grated, makes a fine, yellow powder for flavouring cakes and puddings.

BERTIE.—The Prime Minister receives no salary as Prime Minister. Mr. Gladstone is also First Lord of the Treasury, the salary of which office is £5,000 a year.

OBSTINATE.—Every time the man refuses to obey the order of the court to pay an instalment he can be imprisoned.

N. M.—The climate of New Zealand is delightful, and if you could afford the passage money we would advise you to go there.

ANXIOUS READER.—We cannot say what view a magistrate would take of the case if it came before him. Probably he would order you to pay up all arrears.

INTERESTED.—The wife (there being no children) would take everything up to the value of £500, with a share of anything beyond.

V. C.—The Victoria Cross was instituted in February, 1856, to reward the gallantry of all ranks in the army and navy. It is made of bronze.

CARL.—A dog may, without a license, be kept for herding sheep, but it must not be used for any other purpose.

S. T.—If you receive a judgment summons you should attend the court and state your case, asking for time for payment.

ROBIN GRAY.—Absinthe is an alcoholate composed of anise, coriander, fennel, flavoured with wormwood and coloured with indigo and sulphate of copper.

S. H. F.—Only a Court of Justice can determine which of the parents shall have the custody of the children in case of separation.

A WOULD-BE NURSE.—If an artery is cut, compress it between the wound and the heart; if a vein is cut, compress it beyond the wound.

AMATEUR GARDENER.—Water your house plants, but don't drown them. Too much moisture causes shallow rooting of plants and easy destruction by drouth.

NEBO.—If the tenant leaves unknown to his landlord, and with intent to evade payment of the rent, the landlord may follow and distrain within thirty days.

A. B. C.—The sons cannot be proceeded against for contributions towards the support of their mother unless she becomes chargeable to the parish.

X. Y. Z.—The joint income of a man and his wife must be returned in the husband's statement for income-tax purposes.

A SUFFERER.—Dissolve a tablespoonful of common salt in a pint of warm water and use as an injection every morning. Take ten drops of tincture of steel in an ounce of infusion of quassia twice a day after food.

A WANDERER.—We could offer no opinion whatever regarding your chance of employment in the States, but have an idea that they are not such as to entice you to go over; the field here is actually more inviting.

PATER.—No, we could not give the somewhat peculiar information you desire; it is not the sort of thing that is recorded anywhere, and would have to be ascertained by personal inquiry.

CHARLOTTE.—Put an end to the unfortunate falling out with your mother. If you must marry this month, go to her home after the ceremony and begin your married life with harmony in your own family.

INQUIRER.—You would find information on the subject in any good encyclopedia at a Reference Library, with names of authorities; or a good bookseller should be able to advise you what works would be useful.

ELOCUTIONIST.—The accent is on the first syllable, but if the measure of the sentence requires it equal emphasis may be put on the two first syllables without shocking anyone.

ARTHUR.—You are over the age for both the Royal Irish and the Scotch police. We believe you ought to give up the idea, and emigrate to Canada if you cannot get employment here.

A FLIRT.—If you are sincere in your regard for the young man we have nothing to say against it. You are certainly young to commence courting, but circumstances alter cases.

A NEW READER.—You do not mention in what direction you wish to improve your education. "Cassell's Popular Educator" has been of great service to many who have educated themselves; but you would make much more rapid progress if you placed yourself under a teacher in one of the evening classes, now so general in all parts of the country. Your handwriting is fairly good. Practice would improve it.

ESAU.—We know of no recipe to remove superfluous hair from the face (but by pulling them out by the roots) that may not prove injurious to the skin. Besides, if removed, it will grow again, and probably be thicker and coarser than before.

F. B.—If both families are the children of one father, and it is he who is dead, then all share alike; if both are by one mother but different fathers, then only the children of the father who has left the money share in it.

WORRIED ANKLE.—A father is not bound to find a home for an idle and disorderly son of nineteen; but if the son becomes chargeable to the parish the father may be required to contribute towards the cost of his maintenance.

T. B. W.—Damp the ink stain on a book or paper, then put tartaric acid on the spot; in a short time it will absorb the black element, which is iron; wash off the acid with clean water, and renew the application if the stain is not quite gone.

THE FISHERMAN'S SUMMONS.

The sea is calling, calling!
Wife, is there a log to spare?
Fling it down on the hearth and call them in,
The boys and girls with their merry din,
I am loth to leave you all just yet;
In the light and the noise I might forget
The voice in the evening air.

The sea is calling, calling,
Along the hollow shore;
I know each nook in the rocky strand,
And the crimson weeds on the golden sand,
And the worn old cliff where the sea-pinks cling,
And the winding caves where the echoes ring—
I shall wake them nevermore.

How it keeps calling, calling!
It is never a night to sail;
I saw the "sea-dog" over the height,
As I strained through the haze my failing sight,
And the cottage creaks and rocks, well nigh
As the old Fox did in the days gone by,
In the moon of the rising gale.

Yet it is calling, calling!
It is hard on a soul, I say,
To go fluttering out in the cold and dark,
Like the bird they tell us of, from the ark,
While the foam lies thick on the bitter blast,
And the angry waves roll force and fast,
Where the black buoy marks the bay.

Do you hear it calling, calling?
And yet I am not so old.
At the herring fishery, but last year,
No boat beat mine for tackle and gear,
And I steered the cobble past the reef,
When the broad sail shook like a withered leaf,
And the rudder chafed my hold.

Will it never stop calling, calling?
Can't you sing a song by the hearth—
A heartsome stave of a merry glass,
Or a gallant fight, or a bonny lass,
Don't you care for your granddaddy just so much?
Come near, then, give me a hand to touch,
Still warm with the warmth of earth.

You hear it calling, calling?
Ask her why she sits and cries.
She always did when the sea was up,
She would fret and never take bit or sup,
When I and the lads were out at night,
And she saw the breakers cresting white
Beneath the low black skies.

But then in its calling, calling,
No summons to soul was sent.
Now—well, fetch the parson, find the book,
It is up on the shelf there, if you look;
The sea has been friend, and fire and bread;
Put me where it will tell me of, lying dead,
How it called, and I rose and went.

A TROUBLED ONE.—It is scarcely reasonable to expect us to cure you under such circumstances. We could not honestly prescribe in such a case without being acquainted with all details, which could only be ascertained by careful personal examination.

M. S. C.—We advise you before embarking to write to the Secretary, Emigrants' Information Office, 31, Broadway, Westminster, S.W., and ask the wages given to divers, and the chance of employment for a professional diver.

PERPLEXED.—Without a proper laryngeal examination we cannot be sure what is wrong, but probably you have overtaxed the voice. Get a proper singing instructor from some music agent and follow the instructions given for proper training and production of the voice.

A CONSTANT READER.—Mr. Jay Gould was certainly not "the richest man in the world." There are several Americans who are understood to have much larger fortunes, but we cannot tell you which of them is the richest.

MAGGIE.—There are so many causes for deafness that you must apply to a doctor personally and be examined, in order to ascertain where the mischief is. We are of opinion that it proceeds from some chronic throat trouble, which will require special and long-continued treatment to effect a cure.

PANSY.—Are we to understand the woman has no husband either? If so, she can dispose of her whole estate as she thinks fit, giving it all to one stranger or to many, as she pleases; if she has a husband he takes half and she disposes then of the other half.

H. H.—Your husband's wages are not arreable, and the goods in the house are your landlord's security for the rent, and cannot be touched by another creditor as long as the rent to May remains unpaid; you need pay little attention, therefore, to the threats addressed to you, but on no account should you make any promises or sign any documents.

SWEET-TOOTH.—To make ordinary toffee put one pound of sugar, one pound of treacle, quarter of a pound of butter, and five tablespoonfuls of good vinegar in a saucepan and boil over a brisk fire for a quarter of an hour, stirring all the time. A little of the mixture should be dropped in a vessel of cold water; if it crisps at once it is done. It should be put in a tin when cold and kept closely covered, as exposure to the air would melt it.

SWEET-PEA.—"Rotten Row" is a bridge road from Hyde Park corner to Kensington Gardens; the carriage road up the north bank of the Serpentine is called the "Lady's Mile"; as for the derivation of "Rotten Row," otherwise Muster Row, Camden derives the word from *rotteran* (to muster); hence *rot*, a file of six soldiers. Another derivation is the Norman *Rotten Row* (round-about way), being the way corpses were carried to avoid the public thoroughfares. Some suppose that the name is derived from the soft material with which the road is covered.

WORCESTER.—It is an easy thing to ascribe the reddening of the nose to indulgence, and probably because it is easy, and can be done without thinking, the public does it; but, as a matter of fact, there are two noses reddened by perseverance in ordinary everyday habits of strict living for every one coloured by drink; in your case you have arrived at a period of change, when the system has lost a good deal of its restorative vigour; in all likelihood you fulfil a round of household duties, rising to them without feeling specially refreshed by your rest, and retiring at night more than fatigued.

EVA.—You will decide whether it is worth your while to accept anything at the hands of a man who affects to despise you, and would make your acceptance an excuse for deeper insult; better, we should think, to let him stay away until the legal period (four years) is fulfilled, when you can convince him of your contempt by divorcing him; you are not likely to come together again with enough mutual respect to make your subsequent married life either comfortable or tolerable; you have made a mistake; remedy it now; if, however, you prefer to sue you are in a position to do so, as your husband is bound to alimant you.

DRIVEN TO DESPAIR.—If you can prove persistent cruelty, you will certainly get judicial separation with alimant amounting to the third of your husband's wages; but our belief is that it is always questionable wisdom on the part of a wife to sue a drunken, brutal husband for alimant; the chances are a hundred to one in favour of his leaving the district as soon as a decree is granted, so as to make it inoperative; or if he remains, then he makes the payments he is forced to give an excuse for keeping the poor wife in perpetual terror by his threatening visits to her; if it is possible for her at all, she should strive rather to take the goods necessary to make a house for herself elsewhere, and work for her own living; she is then independent of him, and can order him about his business if he comes near her.

YOUNG MISTRESS.—Certainly the hardest working woman in the house should have at night as comfortable a bed as anyone, but very often this is not the case even in luxurious houses, a springless cot being thought good enough for the girl's room. Though in a city home, the room of the maid-of-all-work is a small hall bedroom on the top floor. This may still be neat, even fine in its appointments, with dainty spreads, convenient toilet articles and a whole looking-glass. There should be a bureau of some description, with a drawer reserved for her towels and bed linen, so that she need not call on the mistress for these things common enough in the rest of the chambers, but luxuries here. A very good way to appreciate a girl's weariness by those who seem never to dream she can get tired, is to try some day to take her place. After getting thoroughly tired out with still half the work undone, a mistress begins to understand what day after day of domestic toil means. When on Tuesday an ambitious girl is hurrying to complete a large ironing in one day, it is hardly fair to call on her repeatedly to do something else, as often happens when there is only one servant.

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